

The American Conservative

Missions Accomplished:

- ✓ Start a war (or two)
- ✓ Shred Constitution
- ✓ Crash economy
- ✓ Expand entitlements
- ✓ Ruin America's reputation
- ✓ Create Democratic majority
- ✓ Bribe churches
- ✓ Recruit for al-Qaeda
- ✓ Discredit conservatism
- ✓ Nationalize banks
- ✓ Cut taxes now, pay later
- ✓ Misunderestimate hurricane
- ✓ Export jobs, import workers
- ✓ Federalize education
- ✓ Spy on citizens



BATTLE HYMN

Amid the jubilation of the Eastern Establishment and the proclamations of redemption for past sins, a defeated minority of Americans, myself among them, is experiencing an altogether different flood of emotions in the aftermath of the people's verdict. Bewilderment, disbelief, even shame.

When the roar of the masses fades, we are left with a man born to run for the nation's highest office but ill-equipped to hold it. In a mere two months, the White House will be occupied by someone who speaks of hope and building up yet will undoubtedly attempt to tear down the last vestiges of our constitutional government. George Washington's simple faith, Coolidge's sincerity, and Reagan's drive to preserve a free people contrast starkly with this demagogue, who degrades reason through petty persuasion.

To him the unalienable rights of man are not life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness but whatever government deems them to be. Nor does his trust reside in the character and ideals of a free people under the faithful watch of a sovereign God. Rather, at his core is an abiding faith in his own ability to transform a nation.

From the coming tyranny few institutions and customs are safe. Freedom of religion and economic liberty are obstacles on the road to a perfect society to be built through judicial decree and executive mandate.

For the philosophical descendants of Kirk, Buckley, and Goldwater, three options remain in the face of this impending calamity: apathy, détente, or confrontation. Apathy is inconceivable, as the lives and livelihoods of our fellow citizens and our posterity are at stake. Peaceful coexistence is unjustifiable, as any compromise with evil is bound to result in evil. Compromise with reason-

able statesmen of conflicting philosophies is often noble, but concessions to a despot are the first steps toward slavery. Confrontation, then, is the course we must take. The battle is lost, but the war may yet be won.

JUSTIN ROWLAND
Steubenville, Ohio

MCCAIN'S MISTAKE

"All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing," wrote Edmund Burke. Evil can also triumph when good people do the wrong thing.

The Republicans are a confused party. This allows Democrats, with their seductive "socially conscious" materialism, to move in. Until Republicans get consistent about limited government, personal responsibility, and what it truly means to be pro-life, they will continue to get their clocks cleaned.

John McCain ran an honorable campaign, yet he failed at the critical moment. The bank bailout presented him with an opportunity to put Republicans behind an ethic of responsibility. But instead of putting Country First, the senator chose Country Club First.

JAMES MOSHER
Ledyard, Conn.

SAVE US!

Regarding Lew Rockwell's piece in the Nov. 13 issue, not voting would be playing right into their hands—roll over and die. How could one as loyal to the nation and its ailing system retreat into smug obscurity? Take your marbles and go home because they are not playing by your rules? Not voting is what led us into this mess we are in now.

If Rockwell does not retract his position, he must resign as head of his own organization. His mistake could lead to the end of freedom as we cherish it and put the nation in a critical state of vulnerability to attack.

There is only one choice, Lew. On that you are right. The choice is Obama to save the nation.

TIM HOLM
Via e-mail

ABSTINENCE EDUCATION

Throughout my voting life I've faced a conundrum because I've generally disliked the Republicans and have absolutely despised the Democrats.

My first vote was happily cast for Reagan in 1980. I voted for him again in 1984. I couldn't bring myself to vote for Bush in 1988, so I voted for Ron Paul, the Libertarian Party candidate. I voted for Ross Perot in 1992. I even voted for Ralph Nader in 2004, despite his crackpot economics, because I was so appalled by George W. Bush's ill-premised war in Iraq. The ballots I've cast for other offices have largely been for Republicans.

However, given the reckless borrowing and spending that Bush and the Republican Congress have undertaken, I could no longer bring myself to hold my nose and vote for any GOP candidates this year. I've finally become what I've threatened to become for years—a nonvoter. I've concluded that a vote for anyone is nothing more than a vote for a system where power-hungry politicians and greedy lobbyists wreck our future for their own self-interest. I'm done supporting that.

On Nov. 5, I woke up with a clean conscience, knowing that I abstained from selecting the lesser among evils.

ERIC P. BLANKENBURG
Via e-mail

The American Conservative welcomes letters to the editor. Submit by e-mail to letters@amconmag.com, by fax to 703-875-3350, or by mail to 1300 Wilson Blvd., Suite 120, Arlington, VA 22209. Please include your name, address, and phone number. We reserve the right to edit all correspondence for space and clarity.

Contents

November 17, 2008 / Vol. 7, No. 22

COLUMNS

26 Patrick J. Buchanan: When Elephants Forget

27 Daniel Larison: We Are All Socialists Now

35 Bill Kauffman: Gardening at Night

NEWS & VIEWS

4 Fourteen Days: The Triumph of Hope; Where's the Third Party?; What's the Matter with Pennsylvania?

25 Deep Background: Why Syria Gave U.S. Attacks a Pass

ARTICLES

16 Paul Gottfried: Republicans stand athwart history yelling, "Left turn ahead!"

18 W. James Antle III: Congress had lower approval ratings than Bush, but Americans voted for more of the same.

20 Michael Brendan Dougherty: California's Proposition 8 won't stop gay marriage.

22 Steve Sailer: How the American property ladder fell over

ARTS & LETTERS

28 Steve Sailer: Oliver Stone's "W."

29 Brendan O'Neill: *The Prosecution of George W. Bush for Murder* by Vincent Bugliosi

31 David Gordon: *The Tyranny of Liberalism: Understanding and Overcoming Administered Freedom, Inquisitorial Tolerance, and Equality by Command* by James Kalb

33 Jeremy Beer: *Real Education: Four Simple Truths for Bringing America's Schools Back to Reality* by Charles Murray

[COVER]

Bush's Broken Record

The 43rd president leaves office without a legacy to stand on.

He Fought the Wars and the Wars Won

BY GARY BRECHER Empty flight suit **Page 6**

Full Faith and Bad Credit

BY PATRICK J. DENEEN Fiddling while Wall Street burns **Page 8**

A Long Train of Abuses

BY ALEXANDER COCKBURN On civil liberties, Bush followed Clinton. **Page 10**

Discounting Family Values

BY ALLAN CARLSON Terror War trumps Culture War. **Page 12**

Conservatives Follow the Leader

BY LLEWELLYN H. ROCKWELL JR. Anything for the White House **Page 14**

COVER ILLUSTRATION: CHRIS HIERS

[PRESIDENT]

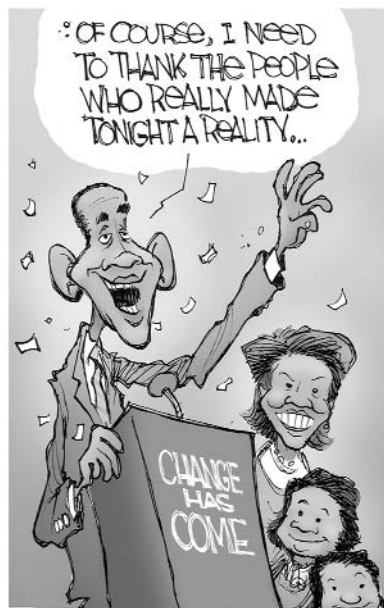
I HOPE, THEREFORE I AM

Perhaps the revelers pouring into American streets to celebrate Barack Obama's victory were honoring his historic achievement. More likely they—like the pundits who narrated the festivities—were congratulating themselves. We are so tolerant, so progressive, so open to change. What sort of change exactly? The bumper sticker didn't specify.

Politics is in large part pageantry—emblem wrapped in ceremony spun by rhetoric. But candidates come with agendas, and in this case the crowds have been so caught up in what Obama symbolizes that they have little idea what he plans to do. One woman caught on tape at a late rally exulted that once Obama was president, she wouldn't have to put gas in her car or pay her mortgage. A Fox talker speculated on election night that Obama's party affiliation might not have mattered: voters were enamored with the "idea" of him.

Onto that void, they projected their fondest hopes. But Barack Obama is no blank. He ran without boasting of accomplishments because his record is so very thin: four years ago, he was an obscure Illinois legislator. But that doesn't mean he lacks ambition, and his short time in the Senate, radical writings, and dubious associations suggest a strong ideological orientation. For all his post-racial, post-partisan, post-everything-we-find-shameful-about-our-history press, this is a man of the Left. And his margin was wider than any Democrat's since LBJ.

America awoke Wednesday a changed country, but probably not in the way most people think. In voting for who they wish to be, they neglected to examine who Barack Obama is. His mindset is no less extreme than the office's departing occupant—and his mandate is far greater.



[CANDIDATES]

WHO'S ON THIRD?

"All political lives end in failure," said the British politician Enoch Powell. This seems especially true for third-party presidential candidates. Once more, for all the dissatisfaction with red-blue politics, the also-rans gained little traction. No minor challenger—black/white, Left/Right, sane/not—broke 1 percent.

There were small improvements for the 2008 outsiders. Ralph Nader, that quadrennial bronze-medalist, came third again, with more than 650,000 votes, a sizeable increase from his 2004 score of 407,992. Closest to him, Bob Barr, the Libertarian Party nominee, notched over 487,000 votes, almost 100,000 more than the LP got last cycle. The Constitution Party candidate, Chuck Baldwin, also outperformed his predecessor, winning over 174,000 votes.

Further down the list is Alan Keyes, the veteran electoral loser whom Obama beat in 2004 for the Illinois Senate seat. Keyes, a fervent pro-lifer who earlier this year compared his career to an abortion, formed his own America's Independent Party after failing to secure the nominations of the Republican and Constitution Parties. He ran in just three states, California, Colorado, and Florida, yet still—with the support of the Christian Falangist Party—attracted almost 35,000 votes. You can't keep a bad politician down. Look for another Keyes challenge in 2012, if not sooner.



[CULTURE]

OBAMA'S KEYSTONE

Republicans have proven once again that they don't understand Pennsylvania—though Pennsylvanians certainly understand the GOP. Bush went all-out to win the state in 2004, but couldn't. Republican Sen. Rick Santorum fell in '06. Now Obama has won a decisive victory in the Keystone State, 55 to 44 percent.

Pundits predicted that Pennsylvania might be the one state where Obama would prevail but Democrats might lose congressional seats. Not so. Putatively endangered incumbents John Murtha and Chris Carney cruised to reelection with margins well over 50 percent. Even Rep. Paul Kanjorski, all but written off by the pollsters, narrowly triumphed against challenger Lou Barletta—a strong conservative voice for restricting immigration and one of the few Republicans who actually deserved to win. Meanwhile, Democrats knocked off GOP Rep. Phil English in the Third District.

How could Republicans get Pennsylvania so wrong? Ironically, the GOP seems to believe the things that Democrats like Obama and Murtha say about the state: that it's full of racist hicks who cling to their guns and Bibles. In fact, the people clinging to their guns and Bibles are not the imbeciles that both parties take them for. They understood perfectly well what the GOP had accomplished in eight years under Bush and cast their ballots accordingly.

In Pennsylvania—as well as in Ohio and Indiana—the GOP tried to appeal to blue-collar, rural, and lower middle-class voters by pandering to their worst instincts: fear of socialists, Arabs (like that Barack Hussein fella), and black radicalism. The seriously underestimated the intelligence of Keystone voters. Working-class whites and socially conservative Catholics want a realistic foreign policy and competent economic oversight just like most of the rest of the country.

[BATTLEGROUND] **WE HAD A DREAM**

Antiwar conservatives and libertarians had their hopes for this election pinned to the Carolinas. Democrat Bob Conley, a philosophical fusion of Ron Paul and Pat Buchanan, challenged Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham in the Palmetto State. In neighboring North Carolina's Fourth Congressional District, Ron Paul-endorsed Republican William Lawson sought to take down ten-term Democratic Rep. David Price. Neither Lawson nor Conley had a better-than-even chance of winning, but just coming close would have been a precious symbolic victory for liberty and peace.

Alas, it was not to be. Soft-spoken Senator Graham—whose dear friend John McCain refers to him as his “little jerk”—strode to a 58-42 percent victory over the under-funded Conley, though the challenger might take some comfort in knowing that he lost to Graham by a slimmer margin than former governor Jim Gilmore lost to (also) former governor Mark Warner in Virginia. (That was a real blowout, 64-34 percent.) Lawson's campaign, meanwhile, was drowned by the Democratic tide that saw Obama best McCain in the Tarheel State. Lawson lost 37-63.

But conservatives can rejoice at least a little in the North Carolina results, as

establishment placeholder Sen. Elizabeth Dole, successor to Jesse Helms only in the most literal sense, went down to defeat at the hands of Democrat Kay Hagan. We'll start the chant now—Lawson for Senate in 2014.

[REFERENDA] **TAKING INITIATIVE**

Americans voted on over 150 ballot measures this election. The results favored no party or ideology. Most anti-tax measures failed, like the one that would have abolished the income tax in Massachusetts. The Bay State did decriminalize the possession of small amounts of marijuana. Nebraska, thanks to the efforts of Ward Connerly, outlawed affirmative action in public institutions. Anti same-sex marriage amendments passed, barely, in three states.

Pro-lifers sustained a series of disappointments. An abortion ban failed for the second time in South Dakota. A Colorado initiative that would have conferred legal personhood at conception also came up short. Meanwhile, Washington state passed an initiative to allow terminally ill patients to self-administer euthanizing barbiturates. Former Washington governor Booth Gardner, who has Parkinson's disease and championed the bill, told the *New York Times Magazine*, “I can't see where anybody benefits by my hanging around.”

Reflecting the wild and charming diversity of a country so large, quirky local issues made national headlines, too. Mainers, believing cheap booze is the best medicine, rejected a tax increase on beer that would have helped fund state healthcare. Improving its reputation for family values, South Carolina changed its age of sexual consent from 14 to 16. And polite Iowans voted to soften the language of their constitution, which for 151 years prohibited individuals deemed an “idiot or insane” from voting. ■

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Bush's Broken Record

When future historians argue over the legacy of George W. Bush, the question they confront may be just which bracket of presidential failure he belongs in. Nixon and Johnson? Or Herbert Hoover? President Bush earned his place in the pantheon of disgrace even before he presided over an epochal financial crisis. Absent the atrocities of 9/11, he might have been a mediocrity: a big spender too prone to trust his shallow instincts but able to clear the competence threshold and lacking the sophistication to be truly dangerous.

Then came that epic morning, which Bush answered by giving the hijackers far more than they could accomplish with four planes. His grand democratization plan reduced Iraq to rubble, drove Iran to arm, and provided terrorists with the ultimate recruiting tool. America, once renowned for her decency, became the aggressor her foes alleged.

At home, our failed attempt at global liberation has left us less free than ever before. Ancient liberties, cultural imperatives, even basic solvency were subsumed by the war effort. And the conservative movement that gave Bush his margin sanitized his radicalism at the cost of its soul.

All he touched turned to dross. Yet he departs unbowed, still a Churchill in his own mind.

It would be easy to leave him to that delusion and turn a more hopeful page. But Bush wasn't alone in his failure: a country marched behind him and a movement cheered him on. If the failings of the Bush era are to be corrected—or at least not repeated—we need a clear view of where we've been. History will render the final judgment, but herewith a preliminary damage assessment.

He Fought the Wars and the Wars Won

By Gary Brecher

What George W. Bush loved best about his job was being a war president. Playing war, that is, as opposed to making war like a grown-up. Remember him strutting onto that carrier in his little flight jacket? You never saw Eisenhower, a real general, playing out his martial fantasies this way. You can take the drink out of the drunk, but you can't take the swagger out of a fool.

Compare Bush's eight years to Clinton's, and you see how much he loved to play the soldier. No one expected that from a Republican: Reagan and Bush senior were cautious about betting America's chips. Liberals used to make fun of Reagan for picking on tiny helpless nations that couldn't fight back. Now they are remembering with pure

nostalgia Reagan's invasion of Grenada, air raids on Libya, and even our 1984 withdrawal from Beirut.

We'll never know how far W. would have gone to find himself a war because he had all he needed delivered by air on Sept. 11, 2001. Remember how people felt in those days? A friend of mine said, "It was like the aliens had invaded."

We needed our president to be a hero and made him into one, even though it was obvious he wasn't up to the job. He didn't take the first plane to Manhattan, stand there and say, "We're coming for you bastards!" Instead he sat in a roomful of children, reading *The Pet Goat*, then dropped off the radar for hours before his handlers got him ready.

Maybe there's a lesson here: if the president doesn't cut it in a crisis, we're better off admitting that to ourselves and telling him so instead of pretending he's a great leader. When you make a weakling into a hero, you give him a lot of power. If we'd kept our eyes open and faced the fact that Bush reacted badly to 9/11, we might have been able to ask for a little more detail about his big plans.

Those came courtesy of Cheney and his neocon punks.

What a crew these guys were! Like their boss, they were also woofers, boasters—but of a different variety. Dubya was your standard frat boy loudmouth, but Cheney, with his talk about “working the dark side,” was more like the ultimate Dungeons and Dragons nerd. And you couldn’t ask Hollywood to serve up a goofier selection of dorks than his neocon staffers, who drifted from the universities to D.C. the way has-been pop singers switch to country and western to leech off a new bunch of suckers.

On the one hand, they were scared to death of Arabs and hated all Muslims. On the other, they were convinced that every Muslim on the planet really wanted, deep in his heart, to be magically turned into an Ohio Republican. That was their theory: take an anti-American Arab country, add an invading army, and *voilà!* a nice fluffy democracy soufflé.

So we poured American blood and treasure into the Iraqi dust to prove the half-baked theories of a bunch of tenth-rate professors. The most expensive experiment in the history of the world, all to learn something any 10-year-old could have told them: people don’t take to foreign troops on their streets, and not everybody wants to be like us. You know those Ig-Nobel awards they hand out to the dumbest science projects of the year? The Iraq invasion is the all-time winner. Retire the trophy with the names of the winning team: Bush, Cheney, Kristol, Wolfowitz, Feith.

But first came Afghanistan—“the graveyard of empires.” Every military-history wannabe was conjuring the ghosts of that Victorian British army slaughtered by the Afghans, along with all the propaganda we’d been pushing about the invincible mujahedeen who’d driven out the Soviets. Looking back, what they had routed was a dying Soviet state, and they didn’t even manage to do that until we took the risk of giving them Stinger anti-aircraft missiles. But all the pundits’ knees were shaking about going into the Afghan haunted house.

We started slow, the way American armies tend to do, taking a while to limber up. There were weeks of bombing the Shomali Plain to no visible effect and a Special Forces raid on Mullah Omar’s compound that was more “Naked Gun” than “Top Gun.” Then Mazar-i-Sharif in the north fell suddenly, and it turned into the kind of war that Northern Alliance fighters and fighter-bomber pilots both love: hunting down a fleeing enemy.

The campaign went so well, so fast, that it taught Bush and Cheney the wrong lessons. They started exporting democracy to Afghanistan, even hiring a local Pashtun girl to read the Kabul evening news. When you tell a big, backwards tribe like the Pashtun that you’re going to turn their whole world upside down for them, you shouldn’t expect them to be grateful. But we did, setting ourselves up for a whole lot of trouble later on.

Worse yet, Bush’s people figured that since Afghanistan, the tough nut, cracked so easily, their pet project, a second Iraq invasion, would be a cakewalk. This time they would do it right, occupying the Iraqi cities instead of just crushing Saddam’s army and withdrawing like Bush senior did.

Nobody wants to recall what Americans believed back then. That’s OK: I’ll remember it. People thought that Saddam was “connected to” 9/11, and his agents were going to poison our water, nuke our cities, and gas our subways. At least they claimed to believe all that unlikely James Bond stuff. I don’t think they really did. There was just so much revenge momentum after 9/11 that it had to burst out somewhere. Everybody wanted payback. It’s natural. But most of the time, in your average democracy, cooler heads are in charge. Not this time. Bush and his team were foaming at the mouth far more than the average citizen. It was like a crazed sheriff trying to talk a lukewarm mob into a lynching frenzy. With the help of people who should have known better—I’m looking at you, Colin Powell—he got his way.

That, in the short version, is why George W. Bush is about to leave office the most unpopular American president in history. You can spin Iraq a hundred different ways, but it still comes up bad news because once the dust settles, the Iranians are in control of the whole region, and they didn’t have to fire a shot. We destroyed their old rival for them.

It’s a simple story: we crushed Saddam’s army, occupied the cities, and then acted like the whole country would turn itself into a neocon fantasyland. Paul Bremer’s cult kids were talking tax reform while the Iraqi army they had sent home unemployed was busy digging up the weapons they had buried in their yards. Bush’s counterinsurgency policy was pretending there was no insurgency then pretending it was just Saddam’s “deadenders.” When Saddam’s capture at the end of 2003 didn’t slow the insurgency, Bush’s defenders stopped acting like they knew what was going on and just settled for blaming the Iranians—as if it was a nasty surprise that Iran, the country that openly hates America most in the whole world, might get involved in anti-American operations when we occupied Iraq right next door.

People ask what our counterinsurgency strategy was before the surge. Easy: we had none. We were doing nothing but offering the insurgents moving targets. A standard operation for the occupation force in those dark days was patrolling through an alien Sunni neighborhood, waiting for an IED to go off under the lead vehicle or for an RPG or small-arms ambush. When that happens, conventional forces have a grim choice: do nothing, withdrawing while the locals snicker at your dead and wounded, or open fire on everyone in sight. Either way, the insurgents win. If you withdraw, they’ve hit you with impunity

and gained respect in the neighborhood. If you open fire on the slums, you kill civilians and make enemies.

Effective counterinsurgency means not relying on massive firepower the way conventional forces are trained to do. The idea is not to fire until you know exactly who you're up against. It's the opposite of shock and awe. It's discipline and patience. Gen. David Petraeus implemented a set of reforms usually called the surge, though they were about tactics more than reinforcements. All he really did was initiate overdue standard counterinsurgency doctrine. He integrated U.S. units with Iraqi forces then sent them out into the neighborhoods. You can't run any kind of counterinsurgency plan without good street-level intelligence, but Bush's people wouldn't admit that there was an insurgency, so they wouldn't commit to learning about it. Their style was to ignore it and hope it would go away.

That's why Afghanistan went well in the early stages: we didn't go in trying to turn the Afghans into democrats, but trying to crush the Taliban and al-Qaeda. In Iraq, Bush was dreaming from the start, so the whole effort was doomed.

The surge worked about as well as any good counterinsurgency effort could. We know a little about the enemy now, and there's less violence because all the neighborhoods had already been ethnically cleansed. Baghdad is now a Shi'ite city. There are a few Sunni enclaves, but the Shia rule the city and the country, with the Kurds fortifying themselves up north and wishing they could saw their territory off and relocate it somewhere in mid-ocean.

That's what Bush's trillion-dollar investment in Iraq has bought. Meanwhile, if you look at the rest of the world map, you get a real shock. Regions like Latin America and Central Asia that eight years ago were American protectorates in all but name have turned against us while we were distracted with Iraq. Many times, the real winners are countries that manage to stay out of a war, the way England benefited by not getting sucked into the Thirty Years' War. Iran is much stronger now, and so is Russia. The Russians, who seemed to be in their "throes" when Clinton left office, just slapped down Georgia, one of our few remaining allies among the old Soviet states, and there wasn't a thing we could do but grumble.

It's no puzzle: we pretended a goon was a hero, let him play out his foolish fantasies about remaking the Middle East, and wasted our strength on a losing effort while the rest of the world drifted out of our power. Our leader was a laughingstock around globe, and he made America the butt of the world's contempt. But Bush got his wish—he was a war president and then some. The rest of us were the casualties. ■

Gary Brecher writes the *War Nerd* column for *Exiled Online* (<http://exiledonline.com/>).

Full Faith and Bad Credit

By Patrick J. Deneen

Until about six months ago, George W. Bush's presidency would have been deemed a failure primarily on account of the botched war in Iraq. Excepting a few prophetic naysayers, almost everyone agreed that the economy under Bush was modestly healthy, with growth rates averaging 2.5 percent over the course of his two terms and unemployment holding at a relatively low average of 5.2 percent.

Remarkably, in the wake of the devastating attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the economy did not slide into a recession—at least not officially. The stock market sagged dramatically in the immediate aftermath. But the economy quickly recovered, extending the longest expansion period between recessions, dating back 17 years. Some credit was due to the Bush tax cuts passed between 2001 and 2003.

Yet beneath this happy statistical story, a darker narrative was taking shape. Despite rising productivity and growing GDP, the wages of middle-class Americans stagnated. Median incomes fell by over \$1,000 between 2000 and 2006, amid the loss of over 3 million manufacturing jobs. In his first speech as Treasury secretary, Henry Paulson acknowledged that "amid this country's strong economic expansion, many Americans simply are not feeling the benefits." Fed Chairman Ben Bernanke also recognized troubling developments, telling senators in 2006, "inequality is potentially a concern for the U.S. economy ... to the extent that incomes and wealth are spreading apart, I think that is not a good trend." Evidence suggested that the tax cuts disproportionately benefited the wealthy, while the lower classes received little and the middle class's gains were obliterated by increases in the federal budget deficit, which cost them \$3.74 in interest for every dollar in tax savings.

Free-market conservatives generally defended Bush. But even as they did, the ship of the American economy was streaming straight for an iceberg. The federal deficit burgeoned from \$144.5 billion in 2001 (1.4 percent of GDP) to \$962 billion in 2008 (6.8 percent of GDP). Over 80 percent of the increase in debt was due to the tax cuts—which accounted for about half of the total amount—and spending on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The overall debt of the United States government grew from \$5.8 trillion to \$10 trillion between 2001 and 2008, a 72 percent increase. Under Bush, the federal government wasn't just spending like a

drunken sailor—it was burning money at a rate that would have put a fleet of inebriated midshipmen to shame.

Over the first seven years of the Bush administration, the trade deficit also rocketed from \$380 billion to \$759 billion, due in large point to our dependence on foreign oil. In spite of the president's 2006 State of the Union declaration that Americans were "addicted to oil," he did little to break that habit. Rather, he oversaw the influx of an additional 250 million imported barrels per year over the course of his presidency.

The microeconomics of the Bush years were as damning as the macro picture. The American consumer was increasingly tapped out, as the personal savings rate plunged from 2 percent in 2001 to a negative amount in 2007. Still, many of our countrymen thought of themselves as wealthy because of huge increases in home equity—a belief that turned out to have been built on inflated housing prices propped up by a corrupt mortgage industry and regulators who willingly looked away.

“A main aim of globalization was to dislodge particular loyalties and patterns of life and replace them with an ethic of individual autonomy.”

That hollowed out economy came crashing down this fall. The stock market plummeted—the Dow Jones average stood at 10,659 on Inauguration Day 2001; in the worst days yet of the present crisis, it swooned into the 7,000s. The financial industry nearly collapsed. We saw actual runs on banks. The government lurched wildly, and the world finally plunged into what most observers believe will be a protracted and painful recession. In response to all this, George W. Bush presided over the nationalization of our mortgage industry and much of the banking industry, in addition to some major insurance corporations. The president who sought to usher in an “ownership society” instead supervised the socialization of large swaths of the financial sector.

By nearly every measure, Bush was a poor steward of the American economy, and he will be faulted almost exclusively for the economic crisis. But in fact, most of the factors contributing to this cataclysm were the result of long-term trends encouraged by Republican and Democratic administrations alike. Income stagnation and inequality, loss of manufacturing jobs to outsourcing, massive public indebtedness, falling personal savings, growing trade deficits, increasing oil imports, the expanding dominance of the financial sector in the overall economy—none of these were recent developments.

The longer story obscured by this year's dramatic collapse is the gradual but intentional abandonment of a functioning American economy and its replacement by a counterfeit kind of economic health based on borrowed money, cheap goods and services made with inexpensive exported and imported labor, and reliance on foreign resources. The creation of this shell of an economy required the transformation of our workforce from one that produced goods to one that consumed products made elsewhere—effectively, the replacement of workers by consumers. The immediate reward of everyday low prices was more instantly palpable to Americans than the slow but steady loss of jobs and the tacit acquiescence to cheap labor by free markets that required the opening of all borders.

American workers have gradually become accustomed to perpetual anxiety, assuming this to be an ordinary condition of advanced economic man. As a pleasant distraction—if not an opiate—the economy came to be defined by entertainment and consumption: two-thirds of economic activity consisted of buying and selling. This perverse system was sustained by stagnant wages and borrowed money. Older virtues like thrift and moderation were shelved as the broader culture encouraged immediate gratification without concern for consequences. Just do it!

Blame Bush—but not just Bush. Elite ambitions for mobile capital combined seamlessly with messages from the popular culture that encouraged license and the loosening of traditional bonds. Economic experts and social, educational, and political leaders spared no effort in persuading the public that an ungovernable process called “globalization” required this transformation. The benefits of worldwide economic integration were largely directed at consumers, and the costs would be felt by workers—as if the two were distinct. A main aim of globalization was to dislodge particular loyalties and patterns of life and replace them with an ethic of individual autonomy, a libertarian worldview, and a financial system in which the consequences of economic actions were difficult to discern. Mortgages were thus made available to almost any borrower so that financial institutions could later repackage and sell the debt to numerous other parties, wholly diffusing responsibility.

In this environment, party affiliation—even so-called “liberal” or “conservative” leanings—mattered less than whether a person possessed mobile skills. Riches were available to those who abandoned scruples and loyalties, who eagerly joined an economy in which efficiency and profit were the solvent that melted traditional patterns of restraint and virtue. What was most necessary was to foster what market capitalism excels at producing: short-term thinking.

Gratitude to the past and obligations to the future were shorn in the name of present returns. The idea of trusteeship was rejected for the quarterly report or even the daily stock price as reported in minute and dramatic detail on CNBC. We were promised a golden future based on 10 percent (or better) annual market returns, when the real economy grew at a quarter of that rate. Greed, speculation, and spendthrift ways were actively inculcated in the wider culture and easily found a home amid a populace bereft of the old mainstays of culture.

For much of this period, our political leaders battled over whether a free market or an activist government should hold sway. These seemingly fierce battles obscured the deeper truth that our particular form of free market favors big government and vice versa. Government has always arranged the playing field for the advantage of swift flows of capital. The market, meanwhile, has steadily undermined local loyalties and rendered small-scale solutions increasingly ineffective, thus ensuring our fealty to a tutelary state.

The mortgage crisis has highlighted the tight bonds between a large central government and large centers of financial power. We have also witnessed the way in which a “flat” world permits no quarantine: a financial virus encounters no barriers. Within a few weeks the entire world economy was brought to its knees by America’s bad mortgages. The myth that structures could be built so large that they could not fail should have been laid to rest with the sinking of the Titanic. At least now we have seen the end of the idea that there is some fundamental antipathy between big government and big business.

Conservatives will now enter a time of rethinking and regrouping. It would be the height of folly for the Right’s political masterminds to try to concoct again the particular brew that led to the electoral victory of a deeply unconservative Republican Party under Bush. In the wilderness years to come, conservatives should spend some time encountering minds that paid attention to the notion that conservation is at the heart of conservatism—among them E.F. Schumacher and Wilhelm Roepke, both of whom focused on a form of economics that was mindful of the moral health of the society.

An economy that undermines the virtues of a citizenry, and eviscerates the culture that reinforces those virtues, has lost its purpose. Yet it is too simple to lay full responsibility for the recent collapse on Bush. He perpetuated a bankrupt system, but the rot runs deeper than the last eight years. ■

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A Long Train of Abuses

By Alexander Cockburn

If there’s one thing defenders of civil liberties know, it’s that assaults on constitutional freedoms are bipartisan. Just as constitutional darkness didn’t first fall with the arrival in the Oval Office of George W. Bush, the shroud will not lift with his departure and the entry of President Barack Obama.

As atrocious as the Bush record on civil liberties has been, there’s no more eager and self-righteous hand reaching out to the Bill of Rights to drop it into the shredder than that of a liberal intent on legislating freedom. Witness the great liberal drive to criminalize expressions of hate and impose fierce punitive enhancements if the criminal has been imprudent enough to perpetrate verbal breaches of sexual or ethnic etiquette while bludgeoning his victim to death.

No doubt the conservatives who cheered Bush on as he abrogated ancient rights and stretched the powers of his office to unseen limits would have shrieked if a Democrat had taken such liberties. But now Obama will be entitled to the lordly prerogatives Bush established.

Growing up in Ireland and the United Kingdom, I gazed with envy at the United States, with its constitutional protections and its Bill of Rights contrasting with the vast ad hoc tapestry of Britain’s repressive laws and “emergency” statutes piled up through the centuries. Successive regimes from the Plantagenet and Tudor periods forward went about the state’s business of enforcing the enclosures, hanging or transporting strikers, criminalizing disrespectful speech, and, of course, abolishing the right to carry even something so innocuous as a penknife. Instructed by centuries of British occupation, my native Ireland, I have to say, took a slightly more relaxed attitude. My father once asked an Irish minister of justice back in the 1960s about the prodigious size and detail of the Irish statute book. “Ah, Claud,” said the minister equably, “our laws are mainly for guidance.”

President Bush was also a man unbound by law, launching appalling assaults on freedom, building on the sound foundation of kindred assaults in Clinton’s time, perhaps most memorably expressed in the screams of parents and children fried by U.S. government forces in the Branch Davidian compound in Waco. Clinton, too, flouted all constitutional war powers inhibitions, with his executive decision to rain bombs on the civilian population of the former Yugoslavia.

Bush has forged resolutely along the path blazed by Clinton in asserting uninhibited executive power to wage war, seize, confine, and torture at will, breaching constitutional laws and international treaties and covenants concerning the treatment of combatants. The Patriot Act took up items on the Justice Department's wish list left over from Clinton's dreadful Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996, which trashed habeas corpus protections.

The most spectacular abuses of civil liberties under Bush, such as the prison camp at Guantanamo, are acute symptoms of a chronic disease. The larger story of the past eight years has been the great continuity between this administration and those that have come before. The outrages perpetrated against habeas corpus under Republicans and Democrats alike, for example, have been innumerable, many of them little publicized. Take the case of people convicted of sexual felonies, who reach the end of their stipulated terms only to find that they face continued imprisonment without any specified terminus, under the rubric of "civil confinement," a power as fierce as any *lettre de cachet* in France's *ancien régime*.

Free speech is no longer a right. Stand alongside the route of a presidential cavalcade with a humble protest sign, and the Secret Service or local law enforcement will haul you off to some remote cage labeled "Designated Protest Area." Seek to exercise your right to dispense money for a campaign advertisement or to support a candidate, and you will fall under the sanction of McCain-Feingold, otherwise known as the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002.

In the case of public expressions of protest, we may expect particular diligence by the Secret Service and other agencies in the Obama years, though his reneging on a campaign promise to accept only public financing has stopped campaign-finance reform in its tracks. Liberals joyously eying Obama's amazing \$150 million haul in his final weeks have preserved a tactful silence on this topic, after years of squawking about the power of the corporate dollar to pollute democracy's proceedings.

Worse than in the darkest days of the '50s, when Americans could have their passports revoked by fiat of the State Department, citizens and legal residents no longer have the right to travel freely even inside the nation's borders. Appearance on any of the innumerable watch lists maintained by government agencies means inability to get on a plane. And today you need your papers for more than just travel. The Indiana statute recently approved by the Supreme Court demands that persons lacking "proper" ID only cast provisional ballots, with a bureaucratic appara-

tus for subsequent verification. Thus, Americans no longer have an unimpaired right to vote, even if of appropriate age.

The late Murray Kempton used to tell me he remembered that Alf Landon, campaigning against FDR and specifically Social Security back in 1936, used to shout to the crowds words to the effect of "Mark my words, those Social Security numbers will follow you from cradle to grave." Landon was right. Today you might as well have the SS number tattooed on your forehead, along with all other significant "private" data, preferably in some bright hue so the monitoring cameras along highways and intersections can get a clean hit. "Drill baby drill" has been the war cry of the government's data-mining programs throughout the Bush years, and we can expect no improvement ahead.

“Warrantless wiretappers had a field day under Bush, and Congress reaffirmed their activities in the FISA bill, for which Obama voted in a turnaround from previous pledges.”

Fourth Amendment protections have likewise gone steadily downhill. Warrantless wiretappers had a field day under Bush, and Congress reaffirmed their activities in the FISA bill, for which Obama voted in a turnaround from previous pledges. Incoming vice president Joe Biden can claim a significant role here since he has been an ardent prosecutor of the war on drugs, used since the Harrison Act of 1914—and even before then with the different penalties attaching to opium as used by middle class whites or Chinese—to enhance the right of police to enter, terrorize, and prosecute at will. Indeed, the war on drugs, revived by President Nixon and pursued vigorously by all subsequent administrations, has been as powerful a rationale for tearing up the Constitution as the subsequent war on terror. It's like that with all wars. Not far from where I live in northern California, combating narcotics was the excuse for serious inroads in the early 1990s into the *Posse Comitatus* statutory inhibition on use of the U.S. military in domestic law enforcement, another constitutional abuse whose roots have continued to sink deeper during the Bush years.

In the past eight years, Bush has ravaged the Fourth Amendment with steadfast diligence, starting with his insistence that he could issue arrest warrants if there was reason to believe a noncitizen was implicated in terrorist

activity. Seized under this pretext and held within America's borders or in some secret prison overseas, the captive had no recourse to a court of law. Simultaneously, the "probable cause" standard, theoretically disciplining the state's innate propensity to search and to seize, has been systematically abused, as have the FBI's powers under the "material witness" statute to arrest and hold their suspects. Goodbye habeas corpus.

Not only individual liberties but federalism and the rights of states have been relentlessly eroded in the Bush years, often amidst liberal cheers at such excrescences as the No Child Left Behind law. Property rights, too, have suffered great setbacks. Government's power to seize land under the canons of "eminent domain" received sinister buttress by the Supreme Court in the 2005 *Kelo* decision.

Have there been any bright patches in the gloom? I salute one: the vindication of the Second Amendment in the Supreme Court's recent *Heller* decision, written by Justice Scalia. Liberals would do well to acknowledge the wisdom of that ruling, just as conservatives should recognize the continuity between the outrages they decried under Clinton and the strip-mining of American liberties that has taken place under Bush. ■

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Discounting Family Values

By Allan Carlson

Traditional conservatives had grand hopes as the George W. Bush team rode into Washington. Unlike his father (alas, "Poppy" was puzzled by the little concerns of Middle Americans), the new president seemed able to speak their language without wincing and to understand their fears of moral and social decay. During his campaign, the younger Bush had reached out to Washington's pro-family leadership, organized as the Arlington Group, and convinced them that they finally had a real seat at the table.

Eight years later, they know their place. On matters tangential to political life, where little was at risk, the Bush White House usually delivered. But when the interests of normal American families collided with military ambitions in the Middle East or with the claims of the Fortune 500, social conservatives were dismissed—sometimes with contempt.

Early actions held promise. At the cabinet level, pro-family leaders applauded Bush's choices of John Ashcroft as attorney general and Tommy Thompson to head the Department of Health and Human Services. Ashcroft had a solid pro-life and pro-family voting record during his Senate years. Wisconsin governor Thompson won praise for his welfare reforms, which cut sharply back on the welfare subsidies for unwed mothers and tried to encourage marriage.

The new administration also placed good people in important second-level posts. Bush named Dr. Wade Horn to the key position of HHS's assistant secretary for children and families, the federal agency most deeply engaged in family policy. As a veteran of the elder Bush's administration, Horn had emerged as a reliable conservative through service on the National Commission on Children and, during the Clinton years, as president of the National Fatherhood Initiative. Bush also named former Maryland legislator Ellen Sauerbrey as U.S. delegate to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, where she took on the *über*-feminists swarming through the UN's Secretariat.

One personnel disappointment, which carried an ominous message, came at the Pentagon. Retiring Indiana senator Dan Coats, who had a solid pro-family voting record and a keen grasp of social issues, was a finalist for the secretary of defense post. During an interview, though, he reported that he would seek to reverse Clinton-era policies that had opened numerous near-combat military specialties to women. This reportedly struck a nerve in Bush's inner circle. They opted instead for Don Rumsfeld, who cast the role of women in the military as a mere "management" issue.

All the same, the first Bush term delivered on a number of policy fronts. The 2001 tax cut included an increase in the relatively new Child Tax Credit to \$1,000 per child, as had been recommended by the National Commission on Children, a boon to larger families. The administration successfully implemented another commission recommendation: increased funding for abstinence-education initiatives, toward parity with the Title X birth-control program. Over at HHS, they launched promising fatherhood and marriage initiatives intended to strengthen traditional families. The administration created a high-profile President's Council on

Bioethics. Headed by the estimable Leon Kass, the council's products included an unusual (and unusually good) volume on the dignity of life, *Being Human*.

On the international front, the Bush administration effectively shut down family policymaking at the United Nations. During the Clinton years, much mischief had occurred at international sessions in Cairo, Beijing, Istanbul, and Copenhagen. First Lady Hillary Clinton, as she repeatedly noted during her presidential run this year, actually led the American delegation to the Beijing session on women's rights, where the real issues were legalizing abortion, expanding state daycare, and normalizing lesbianism. The Clintons were also eager to win ratification of sweeping UN treaties regarding the rights of women and children, both of which would involve a surrender of American legal sovereignty.

The Bush team at the UN brought all this to a screeching halt. American obstructionism drove internationalist apparatchiks into sullen rages; they turned from grand initiatives toward less dangerous troublemaking at the technical level.

Domestically, as homosexual groups pressed for same-sex marriage, President Bush reiterated his support for the Defense of Marriage Act. When pro-family groups rallied around a proposed Federal Marriage Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the president gave it his blessing.

Even before the end of his first term, however, there were signs of trouble. Trying to find a middle way that would placate social liberals, the White House backed federal funding for certain forms of stem-cell research. Most pro-life and pro-family groups favored a total ban. Meanwhile, HHS projects to promote marriage and fatherhood were moving instead toward a punishing noncustodial fathers, pleasing feminists, and creating perverse incentives for divorce.

After "values voters" won credit for re-electing Bush in 2004, pro-family leaders made judges their top priority. Here again, the president stumbled, initially nominating Harriet Miers to the Supreme Court, though his subsequent choices of John Roberts and Samuel Alito won hosannas from social conservatives.

Pro-family leaders might have accomplished more had they adopted a more strategic approach. In 2005, however, they spent vast amounts of political capital in a frenzied effort to save Terri Schiavo. Special congressional late-night sessions, emergency bills, the attempted federalization of a state issue, and midnight presidential signatures—any special interest, even one riding high, can only call on these once per election cycle. Not only did the effort to save Schiavo fail, but the oddities of the campaign marked the beginning of the end for Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist's presidential aspirations. The controversy probably contributed to

the fall of House Majority Leader Tom DeLay and may have been a factor in the Republicans losing Congress in 2006. All the same, whatever the broader wisdom, Bush did here what pro-family groups in Washington asked him to do.

At another level, though, the Bush team sacrificed the prospect of greater pro-family initiatives—like so much else—to the war in Iraq. Most disturbingly, the Defense Department relentlessly manipulated, and at times simply ignored, laws that limited exposure of women to combat. Desperate to fill its ranks, the Army ignored the lessons of all human history and put women—including young mothers—at risk, a shameful blot on the American record. Hundreds have been killed and many more severely wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan. Thousands have spent months, if not years, separated from their families.

The administration's deliberate twisting of gender roles was on gruesome display in the case of Jessica Lynch, in which Pentagon propagandists blatantly lied about her capture in the early days of the Iraq War, turning a frightened victim of Iraqi sexual abuse into a female version of Sergeant York. Private Lynndie England's infamous exploits in the Abu Ghraib prison were another sign of the Pentagon's direct complicity in the feminist-inspired degradation of American women.

In pursuit of its military agenda, the Bush administration achieved another landmark of gender-role engineering. Its deployment of women into combat made sure, given prior court decisions, that if the nation must someday return to a draft, the daughters of American families will join their brothers in involuntary military service.

The Bush White House also held family tax relief hostage to other agendas. The Child Tax Credit is the one component of the 2001 Bush tax cut that has enjoyed strong support on the Democratic side, yet it is scheduled to expire in 2010. On any given day, a strong congressional majority could have been won for making this provision permanent, yet the White House insisted on keeping it tied to tax breaks for Big Business. The consequence? American families lost once again.

The Bush administration also refused to embrace a broader package of pro-family economic initiatives. The proposed Parents' Tax Relief Act, sponsored by Sen. Sam Brownback and Rep. Lee Terry, would make the Child Tax Credit permanent and indexed to inflation, double the personal income tax exemption for children, give parents at home a tax benefit equal to that given to daycare users, encourage home-based businesses, and treat full-time parenting as real work relative to Social Security credits. The bill has enjoyed broad support from pro-family groups, small business associations, and home-based entrepreneurs. But

the Bush domestic policy team turned up its collective nose, insisting that any new tax relief should go to corporate America, not parents and children or even family businesses.

On family questions, then, the Bush legacy is mixed. Initial personnel decisions, social policy at the UN, the selection of judges, and early policy initiatives at HHS draw high marks. But whenever natural family values went up against the war in Iraq, the manpower needs of the Pentagon, corporate interests, or even political expediency, there was no contest: families were ignored. ■

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Conservatives Follow the Leader

By Llewellyn H. Rockwell Jr.

The relationship between the Bush administration and the conservative movement was hardly unexpected. Conservatives were disappointed when George W. Bush was nominated, since he is not a card-carrier. But when The Democrat arrived on the scene, pushing the usual panoply of bad ideas, conservatives changed their tune and backed the GOP. They always do. Indeed, they assembled in full force to elect Bush.

Of course, he moved left after the election. Many months went by before Bush did what every Republican president does: invite “movement leaders” to the White House for a special briefing. Craven doesn’t quite describe it. Conservatives will sell their firstborn to get a meeting at the White House. The leaders emerged to tell their followers and the press that they had inside information that the Bush administration was on the right track, so there was nothing to worry about. We can easily imagine Bush’s staff guffawing at these fools after they left the room.

After their meeting, the new conservative love for the GOP president lasted for a couple of years, and then it was time for another election and the whole charade started over again. Conservatives issued a warning that the president had

better shape up or he wouldn’t earn their support. So they got another meeting and a photo op and again promised fealty to the Republican Leviathan. In the end, of course, they have nowhere else to turn. No matter how dreadful the president is, conservatives fear the alternative more. So they end up as willing propagandists for the regime.

But this reliable support by conservatives for the Republican president confronts what psychologists call “cognitive dissonance,” which is to say that people will not forever live with a massive contradiction between what they do and what they believe. Eventually, the beliefs come around. So it has been for the conservatives who, in the 1990s, blasted Clinton’s big budgets and nation-building and then ended up celebrating far larger budgets and a vaster military empire around the world. The result has been an amazing intellectual bankruptcy on the Right.

The culminating event was the financial bailout of the Wall Street plutocrats, which contradicts everything that conservatives allegedly stand for. It was socialistic in every way. It rewarded market failures. It ripped off average families for the sake of billionaires. It was the worst form of Keynesian planning. It was an open conflict of interest, as the ex-CEO of Goldman Sachs funneled vast sums to Goldman Sachs. It had exactly zero chance of helping the economy. In fact, by draining productive private resources necessary for economic recovery, it makes a bad situation worse.

And yet, no surprise, conservatives came around. You could check in with the Heritage Foundation or *National Review Online* and find rousing endorsements of this outrage, complete with pieties: “In normal times, we’ve been against government intervention, but these are not normal times...” And what did they get out of it? Nothing but the satisfaction of knowing that they helped sanitize and baptize what may be the worst piece of legislation in half a century.

So we have to ask the foundational question: what is it about conservatism that leads it to do these sorts of things? How is it that a philosophy that it is partly rooted in a concern for human liberty ends up embracing its opposite? It has something to do with a contradiction at the heart of what we call conservatism. In its modern incarnation, it began with William F. Buckley’s *National Review* in the middle 1950s. Half the articles were on the evil of the state. The other half cheered on the state to step up massively the socialistic, global central planning, regimenting, and big-spending government program called the Cold War. Buckley had even championed a “totalitarian bureaucracy within our shores” to fight the Russkies, while criticizing big government.

Conservatives were urging the government to be expansionist and aggressive abroad, and smaller at home. This is like attempting to train the python to be a cuddly pet. The earlier anti-FDR Old Right understood the relationship between the welfare state and the warfare state: they are essentially inseparable, especially in the American context. A regime scheming to overthrow governments abroad will hardly hesitate to dominate companies and communities in America. There is also the problem of political dynamics. If you are really dedicated to the warfare state, what are you

“Most people calling themselves conservatives pay no attention to the history of ideas. George W. Bush certainly took no such interest.”

willing to sacrifice to get it? Conservatives have been willing to give up their entire domestic agenda.

Then the conservatives added “cultural issues” to their panoply of concerns. In the old-time liberal framework that conservatives claim to inherit, culture and politics were completely separate. But in the 1980s, that began to change. That was when the Republicans discovered that they could gain electoral advantage by pushing hot buttons having to do with religion, sex, marriage, flag burning, and the like. Bush excelled at pushing these buttons and watching conservatives cheer.

To be sure, cultural problems abound, given the warfare state and the welfare state. But the answer is hardly to put the feds in total charge. Just as religion must be free from state interference, so must the culture, which is informed by religion. But once conservatives helped make these issues part of the political agenda, the state happily developed an aggressive strategy for shaping the culture in its image, through a wide variety of legislation and spending.

So when it came time for Bush to rally conservative support, he pushed very bad ideas like putting religious charities on the government dole. You might think that this would be opposed by anyone who valued religious independence, charitable autonomy, free enterprise, and limiting government. But no: conservatives stood foursquare with Bush, and even had their hands out for contracts.

In similar fashion, the Bush administration corrupted conservatives’ longstanding support for law and order. After that federal growth opportunity called 9/11, the central government exploited this feeling, and soon conservatives began

celebrating the right of the Bush administration to arrest and jail people without trial, to disappear and torture people abroad, to wiretap and otherwise spy on citizens, to use federal power to intimidate any and all political dissidents. How the defense of local law enforcement against centralization turned into a full-scale celebration of the police state is an ugly tale of a bit of truth turning to madness.

Now, it is not the case that conservatives surrendered every modicum of concern for human freedom. The problem is that the issue is low on their list of priorities. They are like someone ordering from a menu at a restaurant. Yes, he likes potatoes and vegetables, but the meat and dessert always appear more exciting. By the time he eats the stuff he really likes, there is no room left for the things that are needed. You know this if you have ever been to a conservative gathering. The sessions on taxes or trade attract a handful of geeks. But let someone get up to decry pornography and the evil of Islam—or Communism or any other foreign enemy of the day—and the multitudes will scream with approval.

Every Republican president can count on the conservatives eventually supporting whatever policies he dishes out for one simple and profound reason: they hate the Left more than they hate the state. So in the end, they will back anything that keeps the Left out of power. By anything, I mean anything—military dictatorship, fascist central planning, state management of the whole of the culture. One wonders what horror they think they are preventing by opposing the Left.

The answer is that they do not think. Most people calling themselves conservatives pay no attention to the history of ideas. George W. Bush certainly took no such interest. His understanding of American history, economics, and world affairs is thin and superficial. His goal as president was not to accomplish anything as such but merely to be president and do presidential things and hope to land on the right side of history.

More than anyone to occupy the White House in a very long time, moreover, Bush has been completely uninterested in public opinion and impervious to outside input. He created his own reality and surrounded himself with people willing to protect his illusions. For Bush, the conservatives badgering him and coming to visit him were just part of the passing scene, with no relevance at all. But the conservatives who fawned over him had to ignore that fact in the interest of maintaining the source of personal validation that has ruined their movement: their link to the state. ■

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The Right Lesson

Conservatives moved to the middle after Goldwater. That was a mistake.

By Paul Gottfried

BARACK OBAMA'S VICTORY has left the Republican Party and its allies reeling, groping frantically for a path back to power. Luckily, or not, the conservative establishment already has a handful of recently published critical works to guide its meditations. These include David Frum's *Comeback: Conservatism That Can Win Again* and Ross Douthat and Reihan Salam's *Grand New Party: How Republicans Can Win the Working Class and Save the American Dream*, as well as columns by the *New York Times*' house conservative, David Brooks. All of these emphasize the need for a new social direction for the GOP and conservative movement.

These sources teach that Republicans have foundered because they have failed to move with the times. Whether it is Brooks asking us to treat homosexual marriage as an expression of "family values," Frum exhorting the GOP to ditch the Religious Right on abortion and gay rights—but obviously not on Zionism—or Douthat and Salam pushing for government subsidies for the working poor and "earned legalization programs" for undocumented aliens, the common theme is that the Right and the GOP should downplay, if not concede, contentious social issues and engage more purposefully in income manipulation. This move would supposedly help the Right get into sync with voters.

What is most striking here is that these authors are advocating more of the same. They are trying to push the conservative movement farther in the direction in which it has been going

since the mid-1960s. Frum, Douthat, Salam, and Brooks would keep the GOP essentially in its present mold as a provider of social programs, a pale, albeit more militaristic, imitation of the Democratic Party. Yet this trend already belongs to the past. It took off more than 40 years ago, after the crushing defeat of presidential candidate Barry Goldwater in 1964, a rout that dragged down many Republican congressmen and looked very much like the most recent election.

McCain may hold the Senate seat that was once Goldwater's, but he is in no way his philosophical successor. The 2008 election was a contest between two varieties of the Left—between an actually left-wing candidate, Barack Obama, and a spurious, one might say "adjusted," right-winger, McCain. By contrast, 1964 was the real thing. As a critic of the New Deal and a passionate opponent of any attempt to expand it, Goldwater questioned the rationale for an American welfare state. Even more ominously, he combined his known desire to privatize Social Security, the TVA, and other federal projects with a strong Cold War posture. He not only spoke about the importance of defending the U.S. against Communist aggression, he famously—or infamously—wished to support anti-Communist insurgencies, and he hinted at the possibility of using nuclear weapons to end the incursions of North Vietnamese armies into the south. Only in his readiness to resort to force has McCain followed in Goldwater's footsteps.

The Republican candidate of 1964, significantly to the right of McCain, faced much greater vilification. He had the full power of the press and world opinion arrayed against him. Typical of this hostility was the remark by Martin Luther King, which was seconded by Gov. Pat Brown of California, that "we see dangerous signs of Hitlerism in the Goldwater campaign. All we need to hear [at the Republican convention] is 'Heil Hitler.'" By fall 1964, when Johnson ran a television ad featuring a small girl picking flowers juxtaposed with images of a nuclear catastrophe caused by Goldwater's foreign policy, the election was already all but over.

But movement conservative interpretation of the 1964 campaign, as found for example in Lee Edwards's *The Conservative Revolution*, is that Goldwater's landslide defeat was in no way conclusive. Indeed, it became the prelude for much greater things. A Goldwater backer who broke into GOP politics because of his support for the Arizona senator, Ronald Reagan, went on to become president. And Reagan allegedly picked up where Goldwater left off, advancing the "conservative revolution" against the New Deal and achieving victory in the Cold War, which had been Goldwater's explicit aim. Such movement stalwarts as William F. Buckley Jr., Russell Kirk, F. Clifton White, and Milton Friedman moved from backing Goldwater to endorsing Reagan. Certainly some argument for continuity can be made here, even if one hesitates to go all the

way with Edwards's proclamation of an unbroken tradition uniting Reagan and Goldwater to Robert Taft.

In point of fact, however, Goldwater's defeat did not lead to a "Reagan revolution." Instead, the fate of Goldwater and his movement in 1964 caused the American Right to move leftward over the next two decades and encouraged the GOP to fall back into its customary country-club avoidance of tough choices. After 1964, as Jonathan M. Schoenwald persuasively argues in *A Time for Choosing: The Rise of Neoconservatism*, the conservative movement's leaders came up with a blander, more mainstream version of their beliefs and policies. Because of his leftist bias, Schoenwald presents this process in a positive way, stressing how the post-Goldwater conservatives "deflated their extremism," "cut off the extremist millstone," and "shifted from pure ideology to electoral pragmatism." Thus Reagan, when he became governor of California in 1966, did not make the rash budget cuts that some had expected, and he subsequently signed a very liberal abortion bill into law.

Schoenwald notices that after 1964 conservatives abandoned their opposition to the Civil Rights Act that had passed that year and stopped talking about getting rid of Social Security as opposed to "privatizing" a certain percentage of it. Harry Truman and FDR went from being conservative punching bags to being admired, even worshipped, figures in the ensuing 20 years. While the Right remained anti-Communist, it gave up its earlier postwar anti-Soviet rhetoric and took over certain Cold War liberal themes. These included attacks on the Soviets' resistance to allowing Russian Jews to emigrate to Israel and long, drawn out comparisons between Soviet and fascist opposition to independent labor union movements.

Such a revamping of the conservative movement, Schoenwald suggests, came

before the neoconservative ascendancy of the 1980s and in fact laid the groundwork for it. In 1968, *NR* endorsed the centrist Republican Richard Nixon as a presidential candidate, someone who supposedly represented "the conservative mainstream." In June 1969, one of *NR*'s senior editors, Jeffrey Hart, who this year supported Obama as a "Burkean conservative," responded in a commentary to both traditionalists and libertarians who had complained about the magazine's drift into the Nixon fold: "We have got in America what we have got. It is not what we would have but neither is it as bad as what we might have." When in July 1971 the editors "suspended support of the administration," their main reason was not that Nixon had embraced affirmative action and highly interventionist economic policies. Rather, they objected to Nixon's pursuit of détente with Soviet Russia. In the 1980s, neoconservatives could take the commanding heights in conservative institutions because the movement had already embraced a weaker form of their social-democratic domestic policies.

Steps in this direction were deftly hidden by referring to an unchanging conservative substance, in the form of "permanent things" or "values." Besides, even if the welfare state continued to grow under Republicans and Democrats alike, that would only remain the case—or so the faithful were assured—until conservatives obtained positions throughout the federal bureaucracy. Then right-wing bureaucrats would rescue taxpayers from all the other federal employees. Needless to say, this didn't happen. Instead, under Nixon and Reagan the rescuers grew fat feeding at the public trough.

According to Larry M. Schwab in *The Illusion of a Conservative Reagan Revolution*, continuities between the Carter and Reagan administrations were far

greater than either liberals or conservatives wished to admit. Reagan's military budget during his first year in office was only slightly higher than the one passed in the last year of the Carter administration. Far more important, however, Reagan did nothing significant to reduce the size of the welfare state or the entitlement programs that he had inherited from his predecessor.

Admittedly, Reagan achieved some good for the Right by upping the ante on the Soviets and hastening the collapse of the financially decrepit Evil Empire. He also appointed fewer left-leaning federal judges than a Democratic president would have selected, and he made modest cuts in the federal bureaucracy. But he did not reverse the New Deal or the Great Society, and he left us with neoconservatives cluttering the Department of Education and the State Department. And even more fatefully, his vice president and heir apparent, George H.W. Bush, endorsed the Americans With Disabilities Act and a new Civil Rights Act, which came replete with minority quotas and set asides.

After Goldwater, the conservative movement made its peace with the New Deal and the leftward drift of the country. Despite their occasional moments of good sense, Douthat, Frum, and their friends would not change that direction. Indeed, they urge conservatives further and faster down that road. Not that they are entirely wrong when they claim to be offering the GOP a chance to survive. Republicans might benefit at least in the near term by adopting some of their policy suggestions, such as inflation-indexing the tax credits for children, wage subsidies for low-income families, awarding points to immigration applicants for learning English, and the creation of a national identity card. Frum, moreover, is to be congratulated for ridiculing the GOP's frenzied, sporadic attempts to reach out to black voters.

He also notes that it would be counter-productive for Republicans to get behind amnesty for illegal immigrants, a policy that would turn red states blue.

Frum thinks the GOP should be working to hold on to—or recover—the broad middle class by structuring taxes and public benefits in their favor. Douthat looks to a different stratum as the mainstay for a reinvigorated Republican Party. His proposals are aimed mostly at a working poor, but he also wishes to expand exurbia into the “wide open spaces” of the country through government subsidies. Somehow, according to Douthat, moving populations away from urban cores will make them more communal and more likely to vote Republican. Frum’s idea for scoring points among soccer moms and religiously liberal white Christians for the GOP is to adopt more liberal attitudes toward homosexuality and abortion. Republicans apparently don’t need to worry about the Religious Right, whose younger members are moving left with their age cohort and whose older members may have no choice but to go on voting Republican.

There was nothing inevitable about the conservative movement’s leftward swerve after Goldwater’s defeat, however, and there may be alternatives to that course today. Possibilities might include real devolution of power from the federal administration to state and local bodies, abandoning the idea of the “living constitution,” identifying national security with protecting our national borders rather than exporting democracy, and other proposals now coming almost exclusively from the ostracized paleo-Right.

The catalyst for changing course will not come from the compromised conservative movement. Getting rid of what

Continued on page 34

Representative Failure

Pelosi and Reid: the GOP’s best hope for 2010.

By W. James Antle III

IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT that John McCain had won the presidency. Once the chills pass and the surf-music sounds of “Bomb, bomb Iran” fade, think about what this outcome would have required of the electorate. An unpopular incumbent party with abysmal approval ratings would have been rewarded with additional years in power. The American people would have ignored their intense conviction that the country is on the wrong track—a view held by 76 percent in the exit polls—and stuck with the devil they knew over the change agent they didn’t. A stunning upset, the “Dewey Defeats Truman” headline on steroids.

Yet when the Democratic Congress was returned to power with increased majorities in both houses, hardly anyone batted an eye. The single remarkable thing the Capitol Hill knitting circle led by Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid accomplished over the last two years was a negative: they managed to become even less popular than President Bush. That’s no easy feat. Since late 2005, Bush’s approval ratings have seldom budged above the low 30s. Only 27 percent of those who turned out on Election Day told exit pollsters they approved of the president’s performance in office.

Heading into the election, a Fox News/Opinion Dynamics poll pegged Congress’ approval rating at 18 percent. This is not some partisan scheme by Rupert Murdoch or Roger Ailes to embar-

ass the Democratic majority. An earlier CBS News/*New York Times* poll found a 15 percent congressional approval rating, with net disapproval standing at an eye-popping 60 percent. Back in May, Gallup reported, “Approval of Congress has dipped below 20% for only the fourth time in the 34 years Gallup has asked Americans to rate the job Congress is doing.”

Republicans predictably hate the Pelosi-Reid Congress. More surprisingly, Democrats and independents do, too. If there is intelligent life in outer space, it probably thinks the House and Senate are doing a lousy job. It’s easy to understand why: the Congress that was elected in 2006 has given everyone a reason to hate it.

It has tried to do enough liberal things to raise conservative ire—increase taxes, expand taxpayer funding of embryonic stem-cell research while extending it to abortion, block offshore drilling, boost the minimum wage, pass a bloated farm bill, enlarge the federal government’s role in healthcare. It has, as much through its own leadership’s fecklessness as Republican obstructionism, failed to do enough of these things to outrage liberals. And while independents claim to love divided government, they also dislike the “Do-Nothing” Congresses that tend to result. (Before Republicans get too carried away with all this, they might remember another reason voters hate the Democratic Con-

gress: many of them mistakenly think it is still controlled by the GOP.)

Above all, this Congress was elected to help bring an end to the war in Iraq. Two years later, there is no end in sight. There have been surges rather than timetables and escalations that dwarf any draw-downs. It's true that Senate Republicans filibustered Democratic legislation to attach strings to the Iraq War funding, thwarting Pelosi and Reid. It's equally true that these Democratic leaders capitulated by passing war funding without conditions, actually outspending President Bush on some of the war supplements (though much of the additional money was, like our Mesopotamian adventure itself, unrelated to any readily identifiable national-security purpose).

"We have provided all of the money the president requested—and more," House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer boasted in March. They proved equally compliant when it came time to extend the Patriot Act, reauthorize the Foreign Intelligence Services Act, and offer immunity to telecommunications companies that complied with Bush's national surveillance program. Antiwar voters and civil libertarians soon discovered that expecting Democrats to promote their interests was like waiting for the Republicans to shrink the federal government and protect the unborn.

Which brings us to the central problem: in our Coke versus Pepsi political culture, the only way to punish the Republicans for their broken promises is to reward the Democrats for theirs. And so the voters did. Down went Sen. Elizabeth Dole in North Carolina, Congressman Christopher Shays in Connecticut, and Sen. Gordon Smith in Oregon. At this writing, the Democrats have picked up over 20 House seats and at least six Senate seats. Congressional Republicans, having lost interest in reform when they started outspending Bill Clinton a decade ago, failed to

deliver on the promises of 1994. Now they are back to their pre-1994 numbers in both houses.

It's an imperfect punishment. Just as in 2006, when the Democratic tide took out the John Hostettlers and Rick Santorums alike, democracy isn't always discriminating. Sen. John Sununu of New Hampshire, a fiscal conservative who showed occasional flashes of independence, was clever enough to point out in an ad that his Democratic opponent was a Bush sycophant herself when the president was popular. He lost, but McCain mini-me Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, the only Republican senator to the left of his Democratic challenger, won. In the House, such promising Republican challengers as B.J. Lawson in North Carolina and Lou Barletta in Pennsylvania fell short, while undeserving incumbents like Don Young of Alaska and Michelle Bachmann of Minnesota (who is Ann Coulter without the sense of humor) held on.

THE ENLARGED DEMOCRATIC CONGRESS WILL PROBABLY MAKE MILLIONS OF AMERICANS RICH—NOT BY PROMOTING POLICIES THAT GROW THE ECONOMY BUT BY EXPANDING THE DEFINITION OF WEALTHY TAXPAYERS WHO NEED TO PAY MORE.

One of the key races that kept the Democrats from acquiring a 60-seat, filibuster-proof Senate majority occurred in Alaska, where Sen. Ted Stevens appears to have won his seventh election to the upper house despite being a convicted felon. Proponents of term limits have often pointed to the Politburo-like re-election rates of congressional incumbents, and if these results hold they will have a new poster boy.

That the Republicans earned their electoral rebuke does not mean the Democrats, based on their record for the past two years or promises for the future, deserved to win. The Barney

Frank Democrats' support for the bailout, the shenanigans at Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, and the Community Reinvestment Act hardly qualify them to solve the country's financial crisis. With the exception of a few grizzled committee chairmen who have been clutching their gavels since Tip O'Neill was speaker, they will be every bit the rubber stamp for Barack Obama that congressional Republicans were for Bush.

The enlarged Democratic Congress will probably make millions of Americans rich—not by promoting policies that grow the economy but by continually expanding the definition of wealthy taxpayers who need to pay more. They will also claim to protect free choice, in the form of legislation ending secret-ballot elections for union organizing and trying to pass the Freedom of Choice Act, which would sweep aside every meaningful state or federal law restricting abortion. They will consider cutting military spending, not by bringing

troops home or shrinking overseas commitments but by eliminating weapons systems. Democratic leaders will probably avoid reviving anything as sweeping as Hillary's healthcare plan or Bush's amnesty, but expect miniature versions of both to fly beneath the radar.

If the American people loathe Congress' handiwork now, wait until Pelosi's minions actually start doing something. Who knows? It might be enough to make congressional Republicans look attractive by 2010. ■

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Marriage Proposition

Traditionalists won in California, but the tide may turn against them in the end.

By Michael Brendan Dougherty

IN A CLIP PLAYED ENDLESSLY on their televisions this fall, Californians saw San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom swaying behind a podium at a pro-same-sex-marriage rally. Biting his lip and lifting his hands into the air, Newsom announced in an emotive staccato, “As California goes, so goes the rest of the nation. It’s inevitable. This door’s wide open now.” He flashed a reptilian smile before finishing, “It’s going to happen—whether you like it or not.” Under the headline “Tragedy,” pro-gay-marriage journalist Benjamin Wachs wrote that Newsom’s tone, “manages to cross an old-style revivalist preacher with an angry Jewish mother, [and] has turned voters who were willing to believe that gay marriage is about love into voters who are now convinced that it’s about ‘who’s-in-charge-here.’” The scene made Newsom the unwitting star of the successful campaign to overturn California’s Supreme Court ruling in favor of same-sex marriage.

This wasn’t the first time Newsom has inadvertently helped the cause of traditional marriage. His unilateral attempt to legalize gay marriage in San Francisco in 2004 helped energize social conservatives nationwide. That year, when exit polls showed voters prioritizing “moral values” over even terrorism or the economy, 11 states voted to define marriage as a union between one man and one woman. Most of these measures passed with large majorities. Gary Bauer, surveying the damage voters had done to the cause of same-sex marriage, declared it “the year of the values voter.”

Superficially, 2008 seems like a similar success for social conservatives. Fol-

lowing the passage of marriage amendments in Arizona and Florida, as well as California, Maggie Gallagher wrote at *National Review Online*, “when it comes to marriage, there is no such thing as a blue state or a red state. Americans support marriage as the union of husband and wife.” But a closer look at the election results and the legal developments in the past year suggests that 2008 is in fact the year the marriage debate tipped in favor of same-sex marriage.

Only Arizona passed its traditional marriage initiative by 2004-like margins. While only 38 percent voted against the Florida initiative, the measure passed the required 60-percent threshold by just 2 points. In California, Proposition 8 passed by a bare 52 percent of the vote, and exit polls seem to attribute its success to an abnormally high turnout of socially conservative black voters. In Connecticut, voters had the chance to resist their state’s pro-gay-marriage Supreme Court decision, *Kerrigan v. Public Health*, by voting for a constitutional convention. That initiative failed by 20 points.

The events in California and Connecticut present new legal challenges to social conservatives. Each state’s Supreme Court issued pro-gay marriage rulings by a bare 4-3 majority of judges. Each court found that denying same-sex couples full marriage rights is unconstitutional. More importantly, the *Kerrigan* decision made the most sweeping argument against civil unions in a high court case, stating specifically that they violated the state’s equal-protection clause, going farther than the rulings

that legalized same-sex marriage in Massachusetts in 2003 and California earlier this year. The *New York Times* described the *Kerrigan* opinion as written “in language that often rose above the legal landscape into realms of social justice for a new century.”

These rulings give legal cover—perhaps a mandate—for extending marriage rights to same-sex couples in all states that already have some form of domestic partnership or civil union arrangement. In California and Connecticut, social conservatives responded by appealing to the ballot box, with decidedly mixed results.

In California, the reaction took the form of a ballot initiative that amended the state’s constitution to include a new section stating, “Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California.” Connecticut has no referendum process. But 2008 happened to be a year when Connecticut was required to put a question on its ballot asking whether voters wanted to have a state constitutional convention. This Question 1, which appears every 20 years, is usually ignored and forgotten. This year it emerged late in the campaign season as the hottest issue in the state. Traditionalists saw it as their chance to overturn *Kerrigan*. Failing that, they hoped at least to obtain the power of direct initiative, which they could use to define marriage in the future.

In both states, social conservatives were following a pattern put in place after the *Roe v. Wade*. Where moral or legal restraints began to fail, conservatives appealed to democracy. They

assailed the overreaching of “activist judges” and countered their judicial decisions with appeals to “the people.” The failure of same-sex activists to achieve a single victory at the ballot box and the arrogance of figures like Newsom gave weight to this argument.

The 2004 election seemed to give traditional marriage the imprimatur of nationwide popular support. Now that backing is, at best, unsteady. Traditionalists must face the fact that the institution they believe is the bedrock of civilization commands astonishingly slim majorities.

Of course, conservatives were burdened with serious challenges. In both Connecticut and California, they lost the fundraising race. “Vote no” forces in Connecticut raised over \$800,000—much of it from outside the state. “Vote yes” supporters raised only \$11,400 until the Connecticut Catholic Conference, a political arm of the state’s Catholic bishops, contributed \$132,000. The pro-gay marriage side in California received large contributions and public support from Silicon Valley. Hollywood also donated: Stephen Bing gave half a million to fight Prop 8. The money gap favored same-sex-marriage proponents about \$31.2 to \$27.5 million. The “No on 8” side also had a phalanx of celebrity endorsers from Ellen Degeneres to Tim Gunn.

In Connecticut, conservatives were already dispirited by the feeble defense the state’s attorney general put up in *Kerrigan*. “He was throwing the case,” says Connecticut Family Institute president Peter Wolfgang. In his dissent, Justice Peter T. Zarella, noted that the ruling majority never considered the argument that traditional marriage is best for the welfare of children, saying this is “the only argument that other courts have found to be persuasive in determining that limiting marriage to one man and one woman is not unconstitutional.”

Though the Family Institute filed an amicus brief in *Kerrigan*, they were

denied intervenor status and the ability to present evidence to the high court. But they led the charge for Question 1 the moment the ruling came down. Support followed quickly. In addition to their financial contribution, the Connecticut Catholic Conference urged priests to exhort their parishoners from the pulpit. But conservatives had only a short time to explain to voters that Question 1 was a proxy for overturning *Kerrigan*.

In California, a pre-election Field Poll found the state’s residents genuinely confused about gay marriage. The poll showed 39 percent of those voting in favor of same-sex marriage agreed with the argument made by the other side that “The institution of traditional marriage between a man and a woman is one of the cornerstones of our country’s Judeo-Christian heritage.” Meanwhile, 41 percent of those planning to vote yes on Proposition 8, to overturn the ruling in favor of same sex-marriage, agreed that “Matters relating to the definition of marriage should not be written into the constitution.” Proposition 8 passed, but by such a narrow margin that it begs to be challenged.

Uncertainty about the public’s actual attitudes toward gay marriage explained the approach each side took in Connecticut. Pre-election polling showed that 65 percent of voters favor the adoption of direct initiatives and presumably the constitutional convention to obtain them. But only 41 percent of voters would vote for a constitutional amendment defining marriage as between one man and one woman, while 55 percent say they would vote against it. Peter Wolfgang says, “If that’s true, our opponents should be jumping on board to support direct initiative. But they don’t believe the polls.” Even with polls confirming that popular support for overturning the Supreme Court’s ruling was weak, Queers Without Borders, Gay & Lesbian Advocates and Defenders, and Planned Parenthood of

Connecticut all supported a “no” vote for the constitutional convention and argued against direct initiative.

Meanwhile, the Connecticut Catholic Conference’s television ads featured a young woman standing outside the statehouse, calling for a “yes” vote and citing “democracy” and “change” as her reasons. Marriage was never mentioned. The effort failed and same-sex marriage will be legal in Connecticut as of Nov. 12. Gay-marriage proponents hope to ratify this decision democratically by passing a statute in the elected legislature in their next session.

Vince McCarthy, a lawyer at the American Center for Law and Justice and counsel to the Family Institute, dreads the day that gay marriage is approved by democratic means, but maintains, “The truth is the truth and natural law is natural law. And eventually that will win out over judicial decisions, over legislative decisions and even democratic decisions.” But for social conservatives who believe this, the question remains: How?

2008 demonstrated that democracy is no sure defense against judicial innovation in marriage. Exit polls reveal that without the overwhelming support of voters over 65, neither the Florida nor California marriage initiatives would have passed. Younger voters turned out overwhelmingly against them. Absent an incredible shift in attitudes, same-sex marriage will soon command majority support. Shrinking majorities voting in favor of traditional marriage will encourage similar rulings to the Connecticut court’s. And the legal precedents used in *Kerrigan* will be used to challenge the 29 state laws restricting marriage to a union of one man and one woman.

The minor victories for marriage traditionalists this year point to defeats in the near future. Unless social conservatives find a way to appeal to voters under 40, Newsom’s prediction, “It’s inevitable,” is unassailable. ■

Unreal Estate

How average Americans got caught in the mortgage racket

By Steve Sailer

Memorial Day Weekend, 2005

"So, you kids have been engaged, what, two years now?" Travis asks. "That's great. No rush to get married with the market the way it is. Who can afford to settle down in LA? I couldn't. George Clooney can't afford to get married in LA."

You have this conversation each time you visit your future brother-in-law. He lives out in the Santa Clarita Valley, an hour or two north of West Los Angeles. You get on the 405 at Pico Blvd., head over Sepulveda Pass, down into the San Fernando Valley, onto the 5 and up through Newhall Pass into LA County's northern exurbs.

You're sitting on Travis's deck, peering down into a canyon lined with sycamores. It's hotter here than back in West LA, where your \$1,600 per month one-bedroom apartment doesn't have air conditioning because it seldom gets over 82.

"Still, isn't it time to get a place of your own?" he continues. "I mean, West LA's a great place to meet somebody, but are you going to entrust your kids—and I know how much my wife's little sister wants some—to the Los Angeles United School District? I'd be all for you staying in LA if you were an entertainment lawyer, but you manage a drug store and Emma's a nurse. People buy drugs and get sick everywhere.

"I bought this place in 2000 for \$255,000," Travis says, repeating a number you know by heart now. "Here we are, five years later, and the Schmidts next door just sold theirs for \$810,000. So I'm up, what, five, six hundred thou-

sand. The home equity loans have paid for some nice vacations, I'll tell you. My house is my ATM.

"I know what you're thinking," says Travis, who generally does know what you're thinking. "You're wondering why I'm the lucky bastard who turned 32 in 2000 and decided it was the right time to get out of an apartment in LA and buy a house back when houses were cheap. Meanwhile, you're 32 in 2005, when they're expensive. Well, they seemed expensive then, too. But I took the plunge.

"I also know you're thinking you don't have \$810,000. Who does? That's what mortgages are for. And you're good with numbers so you've already figured out what a 20 percent downpayment on \$810,000 is. It's like ... a lot.

"Okay, coupla things you need to bear in mind. Emma told me about how your dad talks about saving up for the downpayment he made when he got that 30-year fixed rate on his little place in Sherman Oaks. That's ancient history. Dude, nobody puts 20 percent down anymore."

Travis's voice has gone up a third of an octave. When he gets going on real estate, he lets his inner Dennis Hopper out.

"These days, somebody arrives in California from Guatemala and wants to buy a house. Do you think they make him document his credit history? It's in Spanish, and who knows how many million pesetas were worth a dollar in 1985, and besides, the courthouse in El Carumbo collapsed in an earthquake, so he doesn't have a paper trail. Documents? He's undocumented. So he just pays some extra points on his rate, but that's

all on the backend. Everybody's happy.

"Don't you watch the news? The president says downpayments are un-American because they keep minorities from buying houses. But you don't have to be diverse to get a zero-down loan. Indy-Mac is handing them out to everybody.

"Second thing, Santa Clarita seemed like a long way out when I moved from Venice in 2000. So maybe you got to move a little farther, like out to Palmdale, Lancaster. Antelope Valley's the new Santa Clarita!"

You're not quite sure how it happens, but ten minutes later, you're standing in his driveway admiring the rims on his Lexus SUV, which are bigger than the tires on your Corolla. Soon you're rolling northeast on the 14, past the slanting Vasquez Rocks where, according to Travis, lots of Westerns were filmed, but you only remember them from "Bill and Ted's Bogus Journey." The highway turns north away from the mountains through the high desert. A sign says you are heading toward "Edwards AFB."

"Edwards Air Force Base!" exclaims Travis. "'The Right Stuff,' man! That's where Chuck Taylor broke the speed barrier in 1957. This is all-American country out here," he says, gesturing vaguely at the gray sagebrush. "Sure, it's a haul from the jobs in LA, but with Iraq calming down now that they captured Saddam Insane, soon they'll be pumping like crazy from those Iraqi oilwells and the price of gas will be back down to \$1.50."

You pass another sign. This one reads, "San Andreas Fault." Travis doesn't seem to notice.

Once off the highway, you see at least one person on every corner twirling a giant arrow pointing to an open house. "Human signs," nods Travis, "like back in the Depression when guys would walk around wearing sandwich boards reading 'Eat at Joe's.' But this is the opposite of a depression." Real estate commissions are 6 percent—\$20K on a \$400K house. That pays for a lot of twirling.

Stretching off to the horizon are half-built houses and recently finished ones. You follow one particularly active arrow to Cypress Creek Estates. "Yeah, I know," says Travis, "The nearest creek is 20 miles south and the nearest cypress tree is 100 miles west. But that's not the point. Everybody in Guatemala grew up watching 'Baywatch' and has wanted to move to California ever since. Do you know how many people there are in the world? Trust me, it's a lot. There's an endless supply of

they're getting this year for dumps in Hawaiian Gardens, Bakersfield, Pacoima, Compton. *Compton*.

"See, in Abu Dubai, nobody knows nothing about Hawaiian Gardens, other than it's in California. Over in Arabia, Sheik Rattleandroll thinks, 'It's like Hawaii and it's full of gardens, so how bad could it be?'"

"Although, you'd figure," muses Travis, shaking his head, "that by now, even an Arab would've heard of Compton."

"There's no stopping them. And the same with normal American people. Every year, kids move from mom and dad's house in the boring burbs to an apartment in the sexy city. But after ten years or so, they've found somebody. The one. They start looking at the price on those cute little cottages around the corner from their favorite restaurant on San Vicente. The price has seven digits,

miniature front yard consisting of a tiny sapling and a tinier sodded lawn. It's hotter than in Santa Clarita, so the walk to the front door through the grit-laden wind has you sweating.

Then you're hit by the blast of air conditioning, and you're standing in the Great Room, with a 20-foot ceiling. "Sure, it seems kind of big, but that's the crucial element," explains Travis. "What are they asking, \$450K? That's not a cost to you, that's an investment, like joining a country club. The sticker price keeps out the riff-raff. You don't want every peon in Guatemala moving in next door, do you?"

One stair creaks as you ascend to the lavish master suite. "The construction's just settling in," assures Travis. "This house is only, it says here, nine months old. The owner is flipping it. Probably moving to a 4,000 square-foot house with the \$50K he's going to make and do it again. With a no-downpayment mortgage and a low teaser rate for the first two years (which you deduct on your 1040, by the way), that's about a million percent return on investment. Can you get that kind of interest on your CDs?"

"In fact, I think I'm going to pick up one of these babies, too, and sell it in six months. We'll be neighbors! Sort of. The mortgage company gets a little snottier about downpayments and interest rates when you tell them it's an investment, so I'll just check the "owner-occupied" box. The broker doesn't care. He gets his commission, then Countrywise bundles it up with a thousand other mortgages and sells it to Lemon Brothers. The Wall Street rocket scientists call this "secretization" because nobody can figure out what anything's worth. It's a secret.

"Lemon sells shares in the package all around the world. The Sultan of Brunhilde ends up owning a tenth of your mortgage. Do you think the sultan's going to drive around Antelope Valley

IT SEEMS ENORMOUS—BOTH COMPARED TO YOUR APARTMENT AND TO ITS LOT, WITH ITS MINIATURE FRONT YARD CONSISTING OF A TINY SAPLING AND A TINIER SODDED LAWN.

people who want to live in California. Do you think Bush is going to shut the borders? The president says, 'Family values don't stop at the Rio Loco.'"

Travis's voice gets intense. "They're coming, man, and nothing can stop them. It's the American Dream!"

"Same with the money," he continues. "When the Chinese get a check from Wal-Mart for a billion bucks for their latest boatload of plastic crud, they ask the smartest guy in Peking where to invest it. He calls up the smartest lad in London, who tells him, 'Lend it to people buying California real estate. It'll be safe as houses.' Nobody cares where they lend in California, just so long as it's in California. You should see the prices

and it doesn't start with a 'one.' They wonder, 'How does anybody buy in the city?' They finally realize: people do it family style. If they're American and they buy on the Westside, then you know that mom and dad gave them half a mil, at least. If they're Armenian, they have mom and dad move in with them, along with cousin Aram and his uncle-in-law. But Americans can't live with their relatives. We go nuts. So, it's out to the exurban frontier for us. It's a perpetual motion machine."

You pull up in front of a Mediterranean-style model house. Two stories, 3,150 square feet, the sheet says. It seems enormous—both compared to your apartment and to its lot, with its

knocking on doors to see if you're really living there? Maybe you'd like to come in on it, buy yourself a one-eighth share?"

Thanksgiving, 2005

The sky over Antelope Valley is blue, your Marathon Sod minilawn is green, and your bride and her sister are cooking the turkey in your new granite-counter-topped kitchen. You are standing in your driveway in Cypress Creek Estates with Travis, admiring the house you two own next door. "So that couple from Hermosa Beach counteroffered \$477K. Nice people. They'd make good neighbors. But I'm going to wait for an even \$500K. There'll be no problem getting that next spring. It's a nice neighborhood. Quiet."

That it is. You don't have many neighbors because about a third of the homes on the street appear to be unoccupied, owned by speculators waiting to flip them. And the people who live on your street tend to start their commutes to LA before dawn and get back after dark. It's quiet, except on Sunday, when a stream of looky-loos pour through for the open houses.

Voice Mail, April 2006

"Hey, it's Travis. My accountant was crunching the numbers, and he says I've got a slight cash flow problem, what with me paying for 7/8ths of an empty house and the market not quite hitting our target price yet. So he says that we should rent it out, just until we sell it. The thing is, what with everybody buying out there with no money down, there aren't that many people left in the rental market. Most of the local jobs are in construction, building houses. Now, my accountant keeps the books for this contractor, who tells him he's got some construction workers from this village down south who need a place to live. Real quiet hardworking types. You *hablo*

un poco español, right? If you need to talk to them, talk to their leader, Juan. He speaks Spanish. The rest of them only speak Mixed-Up. It's an Indian lingo. But you won't need to talk to them. They're very quiet."

July 2006

It's Sunday afternoon. Travis peers down as you pry a flattened disk of lead out of the miniature crater in your driveway. "Well, they are real quiet, hard-working types Monday through Friday. I guess they just want to relax on Saturday, have a little *fiesta*, drink some *cerveza*, shoot their *pistolas* in the air."

"It's their culture. What are you, prejudiced?"

You look at Travis.

"Okay, okay, I'll go talk to Juan."

He comes back 20 minutes later. "Juan is gone, man. That's what they kept telling me: 'Juan is gone.' One of the fellows had his stomach bandaged up. He just got back from the emergency room. I couldn't quite follow what they were saying, but I think Juan had a bottle of tequila on Saturday night and stabbed this dude. Nothing serious. C'mon, they aren't gangbangers, they're working men. But Juan is headed for the border like O.J. in his white Bronco—with the rent money they all owed us. Oh, man..."

Voice Mail, September 2006

"Hey, it's Travis. I got good news. We're not going to mess around anymore trying to get our rent from some mob of illegals. No way, Jose. We're going to get paid on the first of each month straight from the U.S. Treasury! The Department of Housing and Urban Development. Section 8 rent vouchers. They're tearing down a housing project in the, uh, LA-Long Beach area, in, uh, Compton, I guess, to be precise, and they've got this respectable elderly grandmother who needs a place to stay with her family.

Really cute grandkids. A few daughters, too. She wants a safe place with good schools to raise them. Actually, she's not all that elderly. The HUD man said she's 39. A church lady, you know, pillar of the community, big hat, all that. You'll like your new neighbors."

Voice Mail, December 2006

"It's Travis. Okay, I'll admit that I hadn't really thought about the daughters having boyfriends, or grandma either, for that matter. But I think this whole Bloods versus Crips thing is being blown way out of proportion. It's just graffiti. And lots of kids wear red these days. It's a very in color. And all the young people make those goofy signs with their hands. How can you know for sure that the Chevy that cruises by every night is full of gangbangers planning a drive-by? Are you sure you read the tattoos on their necks right? It's nighttime. Maybe they just say 'mom.' Did you think about that?"

May 2007

Travis flinches when the 120-pound Presa Canario lunges at him. The steel chain securing the dog to the front of the house across the street from your house snaps taut and its massive jaws come up short. "Man," says Travis, shaken, "That's one of those dogs that the Aryan Nation prison gang breeds to guard meth labs, isn't it? What's in that house? No, don't tell me. I don't want to know."

"Look at this neighborhood," he said, his dismissive gesture taking in the empty liquor bottles on the curb, the wheelless car jacked up on a brown front lawn, and the knots of sullen youths playing hip-hop on boomboxes. "All these speculators buy houses, hit a little bump in the road, need some cash, then start renting them out to lowlives to get by until they can cash in. Property values drop like a rock. It would be no problem if just one investor did that, but

when all these speculator jerks do it, the whole hood is hosed.

"Oh, yeah, I came by to mention that in June the mortgage rates reset. Bush put this new guy in at the Fed, Ben Bernanke, and he's raised interest rates. So that will push up the payment."

Voice Mail, June 2007

"It's Travis. Sorry to hear about you having to sell both your cars to make that new monthly nut. Taking the bus to work in that heat, man, that's rough.

"But, that's all history. I've got great news! I sold the house next door to the Section 8 grandma. I only got what we paid for it, but I figure that was the smart play. She didn't think she could qualify for the mortgage, but I told her to add up the income of all the people who have ever stayed in her house and put that down as the household income. Did you think Washington Mutual would be so racist as to question how she could have an income of \$160,000?

"Don't thank me for getting you out of that monthly payment. It's the least I could do for you, bro."

Phone call, October 2008

"It's me, Travis. Long time no hear! Hey, I'm sorry about house prices in your zip code being down 55 percent. Bummer.

"Anyway, I've been listening to Obama's speeches about how he is going to invest hundreds of billions to make America energy independent in ten years. So I wanted to let you in on the next big thing. Alternative energy! It's going to be bigger than houses. I've got great investments lined up with some start-ups like biodiesel trolleys. Al Gore is this close to making a big investment. I just need a little help making the minimum required investment. So, are you in or are you out? Remember, quitters never prosper."

You say: "I quit." ■

There is considerable debate about what the Bush Doctrine actually means, but it is generally accepted that the United States reserves the right to act unilaterally and pre-emptively against security threats. By extension, the U.S. military overseas is also covered by the same principle of "force protection," meaning that commanders can order incursions into countries with whom the United States is not at war to punish parties for attacks against American military personnel. With the recent attack on Syria, the United States is now engaging in undeclared cross-border military operations in three countries: Pakistan, Syria, and Somalia. At one time, such incursions would have been considered acts of war, even war crimes. But the Bush administration has successfully rewritten the rules.

One reason there has been so little outrage over the Syria attack is that sometimes there are secret inter-state agreements that serve as a basis for the military action. Though the incursions are violations of sovereignty, they are frequently carried out with the consent and the co-operation of local governments or intelligence services.

Damascus has been co-operating in controlling the flow of jihadis across its border into Iraq, even the U.S. command has conceded that the movement is now little more than a trickle. On one level, then, military incursion makes no sense. But sources are reporting that the U.S. attack on the al-Sukkari farm was secretly approved by the Syrian intelligence service, which provided information on the location of the target. Damascus was unwilling to act unilaterally against al-Qaeda activist Abu Ghadiya but was willing to look the other way while Washington struck.

Pakistan is a similar case. Its government, under increasing pressure from the media and opposition politicians, has again called for an end to U.S. attacks from across the border in Afghanistan. But Islamabad is secretly co-operating with American forces. More than 15 strikes by drones and helicopter-borne commandoes over the past month have killed not only numerous civilians, but several senior Taliban and al-Qaeda as well. The missions have been carried out with the permission of Pakistan's chief of staff Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, who two months ago met with his U.S. counterpart Admiral Mike Mullen to work out a secret *modus vivendi*. Kayani agreed to establish a hotline to approve specific operations where there was actionable intelligence on targets inside Pakistan, and he has done so, though he made clear that his government would not publicly approve America's incursions.

The beleaguered government of Somalia lacks the resources to go after local extremists. It has therefore permitted the United States to land Special Forces in nearby Djibouti, direct fire from warships offshore, and stage helicopter raids to apprehend or kill leading militants. Drones from Djibouti also operate over the country and there are high-tech CIA listening posts on offshore islands to monitor seaborne movements of suspected terrorists.

Philip Giraldi, a former CIA Officer, is a fellow at the American Conservative Defense Alliance.

When Elephants Forget

If the Republican Party “were a dog food,” says Rep. Tom Davis, “they would take us off the shelf.” Bush’s approval is 25 percent. Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton

left office with ratings more than twice as high. But while John McCain and others have deplored Bush’s failures, what, exactly, did he do wrong? What were the policy blunders to which Republicans vehemently objected at the time?

That Bush is a big-government Republican is undeniable. His two great social-spending initiatives, prescription-drug benefits for seniors under Medicare and No Child Left Behind, so testify. But how many Republicans opposed Bush on these initiatives? How many have called for the abolition of either program, or for raising payroll taxes to pay for prescription drugs?

True, Bush sought amnesty for illegal aliens and backs the free-trade globalism that exported our manufacturing base and up to 4 million jobs. But McCain was even more enthusiastic about both. Does the party dissent on free trade and mass immigration?

Two-thirds of Americans now believe that the Iraq War was a mistake. Yet all but a few Republicans backed the war. At the time of “Mission Accomplished” in May 2003, the nation gave Bush a 90 percent approval rating, as his father had after Desert Storm.

What turned America against the war was not the decision to invade, oust Saddam, destroy the weapons of mass destruction, and depart, but the long, bloody slog, the five-year war with nearly 5,000 American dead that Iraq became. It was not the lightning war of Tommy Franks, with journalists riding tanks into Baghdad, that soured Amer-

ica, but the unanticipated duration and cost. Yet Republicans still believe that the war was not a mistake, only mishandled. And now that General Petraeus has gotten it right in Iraq, they say, we should pursue the Petraeus policy in Afghanistan.

How many Republicans have repudiated the Bush Doctrine that got us into Iraq—the belief that only by making the world democratic can we keep America secure and free? Americans no longer believe that, if ever they did. And history proves them right.

For Iraq has never been democratic and America has always been free. Yet the Republican Party has never renounced the Bush Doctrine. Indeed, it is being applied today in Afghanistan. That war, too, after we failed at Tora Bora to capture or kill bin Laden, has become a long slog to create a democratic Afghanistan, which, like a democratic Iraq, has never existed.

In Afghanistan, we are entering the eighth year of war with victory further away than ever. The Taliban grows stronger. U.S. casualties are surging. Opium exports are breaking records. Our NATO allies grow weary. Even the Brits are talking of reconciliation with the Taliban, perhaps accepting a dictator.

These two wars helped to cripple the Bush presidency and end the GOP ascendancy. Yet at the highest levels of the party, one hears no serious questioning of the ideology that produced these wars. McCain pledged to stay in Iraq until “victory” and send 10,000 more troops to Afghanistan.

Nor have Republicans objected to the U.S. air strikes that have killed hundreds of Afghans, or the Predator strikes that have inflamed Pakistan, or the helicopter raid into Syria that humiliated Damascus and enraged the population. If Republicans disagree with these policies and actions, their voices are muted.

Bush is for facing down Russia and bringing Georgia and Ukraine into NATO. Does any Republican disagree? McCain was more hawkish than Bush when it came to Moscow.

The party says it is losing because the economy went south. But who caused that? Was it not because Republicans colluded with Democrats to push “affordable housing,” subprime mortgages, for folks who could not afford houses? Is the GOP prepared to demand tough terms for home loans?

Was it not GOP presidents who appointed the Fed chairmen who pumped up the money supply and created the bubble? How many Republicans objected to the easy money when the going was good?

In this election, the country wished to be rid of the Bush policies and the Bush presidency. But where does the Republican Party think Bush went wrong, other than having been asleep at the wheel during Katrina?

The GOP needs to confront the truth. The failure of the Bush presidency lies not in a failed execution of policy but in the policies themselves and the neoconservative ideology that informed them.

Yet still the party remains in denial, refusing to come to terms with the causes of its misfortune. They will now have the time and opportunity for reflection. “The fault, dear Brutus, lies not in our stars but in ourselves.” ■

We Are All Socialists Now

During the closing weeks of the presidential campaign, John McCain was preoccupied with labeling his opponent a socialist who wanted to “spread the wealth

around.” But this strategy only compounded the incoherence of McCain’s policies and mirrored the broader failures of the Bush administration that stoked the financial crisis that doomed the Republican candidate. In the end, the McCain campaign suffered from the same split-mindedness that has afflicted the Republican Party for decades as it has cultivated working- and middle-class frustrations with the political class while failing to represent these voters’ interests.

Coming on the heels of his proposal to have the government buy up individual mortgages and his vote to provide the government with funds for massive intervention in the financial sector, McCain’s complaints against redistribution rang hollow. He repeatedly tried to pretend that funneling hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars to financial institutions was somehow less socialistic than his opponent’s questionable tax subsidy proposals. His last-minute flailing was not the main cause of McCain’s defeat, but it was representative of the fundamental flaw in modern Republican governance that deprived traditional attacks against Democrats of their force and paved the way for a historic liberal victory.

The Republican problem is twofold. First, the party privileged political objectives over sound policy. “Compassionate” conservative and big-government temptations encouraged the Bush administration to pursue short-term vote-buying measures—new entitlements, easy money from the central bank, and federal promotion of the

“ownership society”—while neglecting the long-term interests of its core constituencies. Second, it has advanced financial, trade, and immigration policies that serve corporate interests at the expense of the common good and has marginalized grassroots protests against these policies.

Instead of representing Middle American voters, the McCain campaign offered a series of symbolic panders in the selection of Sarah Palin as the vice presidential nominee and the hyping of a certain plumber who shall remain nameless. Like the administration to which he has been so closely aligned and the party establishment to which he belongs, McCain offered little in the way of meaningful proposals. His running mate’s enthusiastic class warfare notwithstanding, McCain was unable to bring himself to utter the phrase “middle class” during primetime debates.

It is little wonder, then, that his main target in the closing weeks of the campaign was Obama’s proposal to provide a series of tax credits, which are in effect subsidies paid out of general revenues, that Obama had misleadingly called tax cuts. Rather than emphasizing the economic disincentives created by increased taxes on higher-income earners, McCain spent much of the final weeks of the campaign railing against the “welfare” of refunding taxpayer money to taxpayers. Having supported an enormous taxpayer-funded rescue of holders of concentrated wealth, McCain amazingly concluded that the politically savvy move was to vilify a broader distribution of wealth.

This is the result of deep confusion within the Republican Party and among many conservatives that goes far beyond the failure of any one presidential campaign. During the last 40 years of GOP ascendancy, Republicans have gradually forgotten that they were supposed to defend the interests of the broad middle class against the institutions and cultural changes undermining it. There is a conviction rooted in our political traditions, dating before the time of Jefferson, that a broad and relatively even distribution of property is the basis for a stable and free republican system, and a related concern that concentration of power and wealth threatens liberty and reduces the possibility of self-government. Especially over the last eight years, healthy resistance to concentrated wealth and consolidated power mostly collapsed, and instead of rejecting the most recent government power grabs, GOP leaders, including McCain and Palin, have embraced them and confirmed again that their populist rhetoric has no substance behind it.

In the coming years, conservatives are going to have to cope with the consequences of the monumental failure of Republicans in government brought on by this consistent neglect of middle-class interests. Having abdicated the role of defending these voters, Republicans have paved the way for one of the most left-leaning Democratic administrations in memory. They have also practically guaranteed that the party will embark on a series of ill-fated efforts to imitate policies of the Left, failing to learn that it was this very impulse to compete with the Left on its own terms that brought the GOP and the conservative movement to their current pass. ■

Arts & Letters

FILM

[W.]

Oedipus Tex

By Steve Sailer

GIVEN THE LIMITATIONS of Oliver Stone's biopic about George W. Bush (modest budget, rushed production, lack of memoirs by the officials who started the Iraq War, and Stone's own fading powers), "W." turns out better than expected. Anchored by another charismatic performance by Josh Brolin, this tragicomedy of regression to the mean offers a plausible depiction of the president's resentful yet admiring relationship with his imposing father and the complicated ways that set the stage for the 2003 Iraq invasion.

The historical accuracy of Stone's films has been improving since their nadir with the infuriating but stylistically dazzling "JFK" in 1991. Unfortunately, as the older, wiser Stone has gotten more honest, his aesthetic bravura has dwindled. Two scenes that seemed distinctly dubious: Dick Cheney ranting about America acquiring a global empire of oil and a 1988 passage in which Dubya talks his dad into running the Willie Horton ad. (The undying omnipresence of favorite liberal talking points like Willie Horton in our cultural memory points out that history isn't actually written by the victors, it's written by the writers of history.) The great majority of the screenplay, though, strikes me as being on solid ground historically and psychologically.

Visually, Stone seems to be trying to make "W." look even more like a made-for-TV movie (maybe one of those "Dallas" reunion specials) than the lim-

ited budget mandated. The score is weak. And other than a creepy Thandie Newton as Condoleezza Rice, the supporting actors don't look like much like their real-life counterparts (Richard Dreyfuss as Dick Cheney?) but they turn in competent performances.

Don't expect a complete portrait of the origin of the war, though—there's barely any mention of the neocons or of Bush's unquestioning political correctness that made him assume Iraqis were ready for democracy.

Still, "W." is entertaining, informative, and likable. It has not been a success with the critics, who are annoyed that it doesn't condemn conservatism as inherently evil. Indeed, Stone's depiction of George H.W. Bush as an old-fashion prudent conservative is downright hagiographic. The 6'7" James Cromwell, best known as the farmer in the talking pig classic "Babe," brings more gravitas to the role of 41st president than did the boyishly goofy elder Bush.

Stone was the natural choice to film the empathetic screenplay by Stanley Weisberg (who co-wrote "Wall Street" with him two decades ago) because he has much in common with the president—substance-abuse problems, a religious conversion, and declining popularity. The son of a Wall Street tycoon, Stone entered Yale the same year as Bush. Stone's rebellion played out more flagrantly. While Bush followed his father's path (Skull and Bones, military aviation, oil, and politics), just more drunkenly, Stone volunteered for combat duty in Vietnam.

It's unfortunate that Freud's silly theories have discredited all psychological analyses based on nuclear-family dynamics, because they can sometimes explain much about politicians. Winston Churchill's ambition, for example, grew out of his need to prove himself to and then to vindicate his father. Lord Randolph Churchill belittled his worshipful

son before tumbling into madness and early death.

Likewise, the title of Barack Obama's autobiography *Dreams From My Father* testifies to the author's daddy issues. As part of her struggle with her Indonesian second husband for influence over little Barry, Obama's mother indoctrinated her son to follow in the footsteps of the father who had abandoned him and to become a great leader of the black race: "You must help in your people's struggle. Wake up, black man!" As I document in my new book, *America's Half-Blood Prince: Barack Obama's "Story of Race and Inheritance,"* when Obama eventually discovered that his Kenyan father, an alcoholic bigamist blowhard, was a failure, he developed the opposite habits—sobriety, monogamy, and verbal elusiveness—as a means to his father's still unquestioned ends.

George W. Bush's Poppy Problem was the opposite of Obama's: his father was a pretty good guy. As Stone commented, "Forty years is a long time to wait when your father is better at sports, politics, oil, money, diplomacy, and even academics than you are." Nor did it help that W.'s dad saw younger brother Jeb as his natural successor in the White House.

The relationship between father and son also had its good side. The father kept giving the prodigal second chances, and W. finally repaid him, quitting drinking the day after his boozy 40th-birthday party in 1986, in part to keep his behavior from distracting from his father's White House run. He went on to be a decent governor of Texas. Then the Peter Principle promoted him to his "level of incompetence," the presidency.

While his father was known as the In-Box President, the younger Bush wanted to be the Pushbutton President, the decider who makes a few big, tough choices based on gut instinct, then lets the Pentagon sweep up. ■

Rated PG-13.

BOOKS

[*The Prosecution of George W. Bush for Murder*, Vincent Bugliosi, Vanguard Press, 352 pages]

Error by Trial

By Brendan O'Neill

ALTHOUGH I WAS IMPLACABLY, on occasion almost violently, opposed to President George W. Bush's war in Iraq, I have never subscribed to the idea that he should be prosecuted for it. Something about the demand for Bush to be impeached or tried, either in an international criminal court or in the United States, left me cold. It didn't feel right.

Now, after reading Vincent Bugliosi's spectacularly self-aggrandizing book, I know why. The call to try Bush is built on lawyerly arrogance. It is informed by a deep disdain for the democratic process and the people who vote in it. It is powered by a conviction that politicians should be held to account in the court of experts rather than in the court of public opinion. And its central argument—that Bush's invasion of Iraq is “the most serious crime ever committed in American history”—leads to the excusing, even the whitewashing, of the foreign-policy crimes of earlier presidents.

The legalistic case against Bush is elitist, undemocratic, histrionic, and historically simple, and it ought to be rejected by anyone who wants to have a proper—or even, political—debate about American military interventionism and how we might bring it to an end.

Bugliosi has had a colorful career as a lawyer and author. At the LA County district attorney's office, he has successfully prosecuted 105 out of 106 felony jury trials, including 21 murder convictions. He has, he proudly tells us, secured capital punishment for eight murder defendants—which I admit is eight more people than I have ever condemned to death. He put Charles

Manson behind bars and wrote about it in *Helter Skelter*, “the biggest selling true-crime book in publishing history.” Yet none of these achievements excuses Bugliosi's continual and cloying self-congratulation. He must suffer from repetitive strain injury as a result of patting himself on the back so much.

His new book, it seems, aims to deliver two messages—the Bush administration is ghastly and Vincent Bugliosi is wonderful: “I seem to naturally see what's in front of me completely uninfluenced by the clothing—reputation, hoopla, conventional wisdom, etc.—put on it by others.”

Bizarrely, Bugliosi spends two pages of the first chapter telling us that he was the only person who immediately noticed that, in the U.S. Open tennis final of 1983, Ivan Lendl simply “gave up” against Jimmy Connors. A month later, Bugliosi was vindicated when two “tennis greats” said that they, too, were “disgusted by Lendl's performance.” If, like me, you find yourself bamboozled as to why a 25-year-old tennis match should be discussed in detail on pages seven and eight of a book about the “hell on earth that is Iraq,” Bugliosi quickly explains: his perspicacious judgment of Lendl's performance shows “this tendency of mine to see what is in front of me in its pristine condition.” Others are “blindingly patriotic,” which is “not a mindset that is conducive to critical thinking.”

At times, Bugliosi tries to be humble, but it's a false humility, actually designed to boost his claim to be the most farsighted defender of American values on earth. “I am not, as the *Los Angeles Times* said of me, an ‘American master of common sense,’” he writes, but simply someone who doesn't fall “into the same unthinking trap that so many humans do.” This is masterful: he lets us know that the *LA Times* thinks he is a “master of common sense” while disavowing the idea, thus proving himself both brilliant and modest, just the kind of aloof figure who could hold a president to account.

Having established in his first chapter that he is always right (on O.J. Simpson,

on Paula Jones and Bill Clinton, and, of course, on Ivan Lendl), Bugliosi moves on to his argument for allowing wise lawyers to prosecute Bush. At first, he seems solid on the basics of the Iraqi debacle. He demonstrates that Bush tricked America into war by claiming that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. He is also right, of course, that the war has been an unmitigated disaster for the people of Iraq. Yet it doesn't follow that Bush should be tried for murder in an American court of law—what Bugliosi describes as his “revolutionary proposal.”

Indeed, for all of his radical pretensions, in singling out Bush for prosecution, Bugliosi lets vast numbers of other politicians, Republican and Democrat, off the hook. Moreover, in describing Iraq as “the worst crime ever,” he provides what can only be described as an idiot's guide—naïve, apologetic, over-forgiving—to the last 40 years of American foreign policy. The brave warrior against that “spoiled, callous brat” Dubya ends up as an apologist for broader American imperialism.

Bugliosi uses moral condemnation to discourage critical thinking. He says that anyone who agrees that Bush lied but doesn't think he should be prosecuted for murder is “a very bad human being.” The reason for his issuing such pre-emptive assaults—against his own readers—soon becomes clear: anyone who asks even the most basic questions about Bugliosi's desire to prosecute Bush can easily demolish his case.

Why, for example, focus on Bush alone? Yes, Bush spearheaded the invasion, but he could not have done it without the enthusiastic backing of his advisers and of Congress, too. In the Senate and the House of Representatives, 263 Republicans and 111 Democrats voted “aye” to Bush's Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq resolution. Should the vast majority of Congress be tried for murder, too, or at least for aiding and abetting a rampaging killer? No, says Bugliosi, on the insanely flimsy basis that they were duped by Bush's lies: “The consent that Congress gave Bush is nullified

by the deliberate misrepresentations he made to Congress in inducing it to give him its consent." Here, continuing with the legal theme, Congress is treated as a child or a mentally disturbed entity, *non compos mentis* therefore not responsible. This is the most craven apology I have come across for Congress's shameful record on Iraq. In 2002, there was plenty of evidence that the case against Saddam had been exaggerated. Yet Bugliosi excludes congressmen for their poor judgment by depicting them as victims of Bush's allegedly awesome powers of persuasion.

Even more ominously, in order to convince us that Bush's invasion of Iraq is "the most serious crime ever committed in American history," Bugliosi is forced to rewrite actual history. He plays down the horrors unleashed by other presidents lest they undermine his hyperbolic case against the evil Bush. In response to those (like me) who would argue that Clinton's bombing of

Yugoslavia in 1999 was also "illegal"—since it, too, did not win United Nations approval—Bugliosi effectively says: so what? He writes, "So maybe the US (in the Clinton Administration) was also in violation of Article 2 [of the UN Charter]." The key point, he says, is that, unlike with Bush, "there is no evidence that President Clinton and his people engaged in lies, deliberate distortions, and hence criminality leading up to our bombing of Kosovo."

Yes, there is. Oodles of it. Both the Clinton administration and Tony Blair's British government continually claimed that the Yugoslav regime was carrying out "Hitler-style genocide" in Kosovo, in which at least 100,000 ethnic Albanians were dying. In truth, according to studies and excavations carried out after the Kosovo campaign, the body count of civilians killed between 1997 and 1999 was around 3,000, including some 600 victims of the U.S.-led bombing campaign. Clinton's talk of genocide in Kosovo was as brazen a fib as Bush's WMD story.

Elsewhere, Bugliosi even seems to defend the Vietnam War, a conflict in which some 2 million Vietnamese and 47,244 Americans lost their lives. He does so in order to shoot down that obvious question: if we are to prosecute Bush for Iraq, then why not LBJ or Nixon for Vietnam? Again, Bugliosi insists, the key difference is that these presidents did not lie, thus their obliteration of entire towns and villages in Vietnam and Cambodia was fine and dandy. In truth, Vietnam was built on the Gulf of Tonkin lie, when, in August 1964, American officials invented untruths about the actions of the North Vietnamese in order to justify an American intervention. Embarrassingly, Bugliosi offers a revisionist history of the incident, defending the shameful actions of American military strategists so as to achieve his glorious goal of proving that George W. Bush is exceptional in American history, and thus deserves to have an exceptional trial (carried out by an exceptional man: Bugliosi, perhaps).

Bugliosi contrasts the current president with his father, arguing that George

H.W. Bush was one of America's "fine leaders of the past century." This is the same Bush whose first Gulf War of 1991 (180,000 Iraqis dead) was also launched with a fusillade of insane propaganda claims, including the concocted story that Iraqi soldiers in Kuwait were taking babies from incubators and leaving them to die on hospital floors. It was Bush senior's war that paved the way for the carve-up and occupation of Iraq by American, British, and French forces; the UN sanctions regime that caused so much hardship for Iraqis; the sporadic bombing campaigns of the 1990s (including Clinton's Operation Desert Fox in 1998); and eventually his son's war. Yet Bugliosi, blinded by his seemingly personal hatred for Bush junior and by a stiflingly legalistic outlook, is incapable of seeing the political events that led to the 2003 war, the continuum between Gulf War I and Gulf War II. He celebrates earlier wars that may not have been "illegal"—at least by the UN's understanding—but which were unquestionably immoral, destructive, and shot through with myth and fabrication.

This book shows what drives today's demand to prosecute Bush (an idea which, despite Bugliosi's claims of revolutionary originality, is becoming more and more popular): first, a simple-minded view of Bush, which obfuscates serious debate, and second, a feeling of exhaustion with democracy and the public. Bugliosi says America is "abysmally and profoundly stupid" and that Americans are possessed of a "grinding stupidity." No wonder he thinks only brilliant people like himself should decide what becomes of lying presidents.

On Nov. 4, the American people effectively exercised judgment on the Bush II administration by removing the Republicans from power. American democracy is far from perfect, but I would far rather take my chances with that raucous arena of discussion and vote casting than further empower mythmaking lawyers like Vincent Bugliosi. ■

Brendan O'Neill is editor of spiked (www.spiked-online.com).

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[*The Tyranny of Liberalism: Understanding and Overcoming Administered Freedom, Inquisitorial Tolerance, and Equality by Command*, James Kalb, ISI Books, 308 pages]

Liberal Paradox

By David Gordon

JAMES KALB calls attention in his very thoughtful book to a disturbing development in contemporary America and Western Europe. People who affirm traditional moral beliefs, or who dissent from the Left's egalitarian dogmas, often are subject to harsh repression.

In 2004, Kalb notes, "the High Court in Britain upheld the conviction and firing of an elderly preacher who held up a sign in a town square calling for an end to homosexuality, lesbianism, and immorality and was thrown to the ground and pelted with dirt and water by an angry crowd." Two years later, the president of Harvard, Lawrence Summers, was forced to resign after an outcry over his "rational and cautious remarks suggesting some innate basis for the lesser representation of women in the sciences made at a closed academic conference." Unfortunately, these are not isolated incidents: political correctness is ubiquitous.

If we lived under a Communist regime, all this would be understandable. The Communists disdained "bourgeois" liberties. But of course the dominant ideology today is not Communism but liberalism. Kalb thinks that the pattern of repression under the rule of liberalism presents us with a paradox. Contemporary liberals claim to champion individual freedom—if, for example, you burn an American flag or spew out obscenities in public, the ACLU will combat all efforts to interfere with you. But if liberals officially support freedom, why have they created a climate of opinion so hostile to dissent from liberalism itself?

Kalb argues that the liberals' stress on certain kinds of freedom is not at all inconsistent with a propensity toward

tyranny. Indeed, the same pattern of thought explains both their theory of tolerance and their practice of intolerance. "How people think affects what they do," he explains, "and ways of thinking are no less systematic than languages. Each has its own 'grammar,' its own system of fundamental abstract principles that determine what makes sense and how particulars are to be classified. Such principles have consequences independent of the goals of those who live by them."

Liberalism's key tenet, Kalb thinks, is that values are purely subjective: "The ultimate basis of liberalism is rejection of moral authorities that transcend human purposes." From this fundamental mistake, malign results follow.

If values are subjective, then whatever goals you choose to pursue are as good as any others; no objective standard can establish a hierarchy of what is good or right. There is no way, then, for you to figure out through reasoning what you ought to want—reason cannot discover absolute, outside values, it can only tell you how the values or desires you already have might best be obtained. If, for example, we want to live in an economically prosperous society, we should support a free market rather than government intervention. (Unfortunately, this is an objective truth that contemporary liberals neglect.) But whether we want a prosperous economy depends on our desires. As David Hume classically put this view, "Reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions."

If this is the way you look at values, what follows for public policy? Since reason cannot say that one goal is objectively better than another—in Bentham's famous phrase "pushpin [a children's game] is as good as poetry"—our only basis for action is the actual desires that people have. Our aim then should be to promote the maximum possible satisfaction of these desires. This is Kalb's understanding of liberalism, according to which equal freedom for all becomes the highest principle of politics.

Liberalism thus has a technocratic notion of reason. It supports social institutions that accord with its confinement of reason to the efficient procurement of arbitrary ends. "Market, bureaucratic, and industrial forms of organization abolish durable ties and treat everything as interchangeable," writes Kalb. Institutions cease to be ends and become means. People and organizations that reject this account must, if necessary, be forcibly suppressed.

Why is this so? Suppose you think that, contrary to liberal wisdom, the traditional family is morally better than its fashionable alternatives. Should not liberals treat what you believe as a preference entitled to the same consideration as any other personal value? Why should liberals try to shut you up?

Two reasons suggest themselves. To liberals, the fact that you hold this opinion manifests your irrationality. If you deny that ultimate ends are arbitrary, then you aren't being "reasonable." You mistakenly ascribe to values an objective status that they do not have. And people with irrational views should not be accorded the same tolerance as those who adhere to correct doctrine—that is, the instrumental, purely technocratic account of reason. Further, you might threaten the equal freedom of others. Because you think the traditional family is morally mandated, you may attempt to force others to conform to your medieval prejudices. You are therefore irrational and possibly dangerous, doubly an obstacle to the reign of enlightened reason.

Kalb's dialectic shows how freedom, in the hands of its ostensible advocates, transforms itself into its opposite. Liberals, he argues, really only believe in freedom for those who agree with them.

His analysis illuminates contemporary liberal political theory as well. By far the most influential political philosopher in American and British universities is John Rawls, whose concept of "public reason" fits Kalb's schema exactly. In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls argues that people must abandon their "comprehensive views" of the good, or

at least not rely on them exclusively, in reasoning about public affairs. Instead, they must confine themselves to a set of public reasons that everyone can reasonably accept. These reasons—surprise—ensure that no measures except those in accord with current leftist dogma qualify for discussion. If you think that this isn't acceptable, then you are not being reasonable. As Kalb notes, Rawls "does not say why everyone should accept that motive and no other—for example, a taste for cooperation that accepts hierarchy as necessary in various ways for virtue, community, and transcendent goods."

In one respect, I think that Kalb is wrong. He extends his analysis not only to contemporary leftism but to classical liberalism as well. True enough, he readily acknowledges, contemporary liberals deny key tenets of classical liberalism. Most notably, of course, classical liberals defend the free market while current leftists shackle it with regulations. Nevertheless, Kalb sees continuity between the two. Both accept the

"The objectification of value becomes a contradictory exercise for the classical liberal. By contrast, for the conservative, value is objective, from which it follows that it is knowable or at least discoverable by others than the individual actor."

But not all classical liberals think this way. Contrary to Kalb, Locke is best understood not as a subjectivist but as a proponent of objective natural law. He pushed scholastic natural law, best exemplified by Aquinas, in an individualist direction, but in so doing he did not abandon the transcendent for the instrumental. And Locke was no aberration; a number of libertarians, such as Murray Rothbard, have been influenced by the individualist version of natural law. Even those classical liberals, such as Buchanan and Ludwig von Mises, who do embrace the subjectivist position may nonetheless escape Kalb's dialectic. They do so by drastically limiting the state. Confined to what they think are its proper functions, the state cannot tyrannize over anyone.

And how do we know that the values upheld by tradition are true? Kalb answers with an appeal to faith: "It is faith that tells us that tradition is not only a practical necessity but a guide to truth." This does not put tradition at a disadvantage compared to other paths to knowledge, such as science—Kalb thinks that all knowledge depends on faith. This is a very large claim, but Kalb presents in its defense an acute criticism of the Darwinian attempt to "naturalize" knowledge.

By no means, though, does Kalb rest everything on faith. We can gain some knowledge of objective values through reason, he argues, and we can even use this knowledge to criticize tradition. Also, we can tell whether a tradition is working on its own terms. But reason and experience do not suffice: faith is also necessary.

The Tyranny of Liberalism is an outstanding contribution to political philosophy. Readers who recoil from the arid wastes of Rawls will find Kalb a welcome and instructive relief. But he is no head-in-the-clouds philosopher. He has a sharp sense of current political realities. Here, for example, is his verdict on neoconservatism: "it has functioned ... as a way of lining up conservative impulses in the service of the established public order. It has confused the loyalties it tries to promote by subordinating them to liberal goals and by sapping resistance to the direction of events. ... Neoconservatives have been ready to follow the development of liberalism wherever it might go..."

I hope that in future work Kalb will address more fully than he does here the role of the state. Several of his remarks show that he understands the need to curb the state's power, but this theme needs considerable expansion. Without a strong state, and the public orthodoxy that it erects, the liberal tyranny that Kalb describes could not operate. Nevertheless, those in search of a revitalized American conservatism will find *The Tyranny of Liberalism* essential reading. ■

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KALB HAS GIVEN US A PENETRATING DIAGNOSIS OF LIBERALISM, BUT HAS HE ANYTHING BETTER TO PUT IN ITS PLACE?

subjectivist view of values and take reason to be purely instrumental. Indeed, those ideas are at the taproot of liberalism: "Hobbes and Locke, with their analysis of society as a contract among individuals for material benefit, introduced liberalism as a distinct outlook that made the ordinary practical concerns of men the basis of social order. The Enlightenment developed and spread the view that social standards are human creations to be judged by reason and re-created at will."

Kalb here undoubtedly identifies a strand within classical liberalism. Some traditional liberals adopt exactly the instrumentalist account of reason that is his principal target. James Buchanan, a leading classical liberal today and a Nobel Laureate in economics, says in his *Why I, Too, Am Not a Conservative*:

Kalb has given us a penetrating diagnosis of liberalism, but has he anything better to put in its place? Readers will not be surprised to learn that he thinks the instrumental view of reason not only harmful in its consequences but false as well. He believes there are objective values, which a society needs to respect.

How can we discover these values? We cannot, Kalb argues, rely on unaided reason. Rather, "the process through which we come to recognize ultimate standards is complex and relies essentially on tradition. ... Tradition starts with basic functional patterns that establish themselves because they work. Those patterns grow and extend themselves through the strengthening and development of what is helpful and through the rejection of what leads to conflict and failure."

[*Real Education: Four Simple Truths for Bringing America's Schools Back to Reality*, Charles Murray, Crown Forum, 224 pages]

Saved By the Bell Curve

By Jeremy Beer

MODERN SOCIAL THEORISTS have typically underrated the importance of a basic fact: individuals' abilities vary and there isn't much we can do about it. One would think that this would be regarded as crucial to all thinking about society, politics, culture, economics, and education. But it is usually denied.

Meaningful, seemingly intractable individual differences have always been obvious to everyone not ideologically opposed to their existence. During the 20th century, however, the social sciences—especially psychology and sociology—waged war against the commonsense judgment that individual differences are real in the sense that they are largely innate, stable, and useful heuristics for predicting behavior.

After Charles Murray co-authored *The Bell Curve* (1994) with Richard Herrnstein, he came to know the hysterical intensity with which the modern position about individual differences is defended. The book's central argument—that a person's intelligence is a better predictor of certain outcomes, such as income or job performance, than is his parents' socioeconomic status or education level—enraged the intellectual and academic establishment.

In *Real Education*, Murray has little to say about the modern view of individual differences—at least directly. But it forms the background of Murray's characteristically lucid analysis, which raises troubling questions against the comforting lies we tell ourselves about the meritocratic structure of American society.

Meritocracy *per se* is not on Murray's radar screen. Rather, his goal is to make the case that human cognitive abilities

are not equally distributed, that this is not the fault of our school system, and that the way to improve education at all levels must begin with a clear-eyed recognition of this fact. He makes this case with disciplined precision in less than 200 pages.

The "four simple truths" alluded to in Murray's subtitle are undoubtedly both simple and true, but even in private conversations they are usually only whispered. In today's narrow, censorious public realm they are well beyond the pale. Along with the assertion that individual abilities vary, these truths comprise the anti-Wobegonian observation that half the children in our school system are below average; that too many kids go to college; and that "the future of America depends on how we educate the academically gifted."

It's all backed up. *Real Education* may be brief and proceed like a snappy, well-organized annotated outline, but all the bones are here, even if they do not have much flesh. Possibly to disarm potential critics, Murray begins by adopting Howard Gardner's popular "multiple intelligences" model, only to show that several of these abilities are of "limited relevance to success as adults," and that other gifts are interrelated, especially those which contribute most to academic success: logical-mathematical ability, linguistic ability, and spatial ability. Contrary to what Murray calls "educational romanticism"—it might also be called the Big Ed School Lie—it is simply not the case that a child who is below average in one of Gardner's cognitively related "intelligences" is likely to compensate by being above average in another cognitive ability. In fact, it is unlikely. Life ain't fair. "The child who knows all the answers in math class has a high probability of reading above grade level as well, and, what's more, a higher than average chance of being industrious and determined," reports Murray. "Conversely, children who are at the bottom of the math class usually have trouble with reading as well, and also have a higher than average chance of showing problems with thinking ahead and disciplining themselves."

The theory of multiple intelligences does nothing to rescue educational romanticism. It just throws a different light on the landscape of individual differences. We shouldn't fool ourselves, warns Murray, "that if only we tap the special abilities that reside in every child, everything will work out. ... The core abilities that dominate academic success vary together. Schools that ignore those realities are doing a disservice to all their students."

Part of the reason many of the elite resist this conclusion is that they almost never associate with folks of below-average cognitive ability—and therefore they have unrealistic, ideologically formed opinions of their capacities. A graduate-school colleague of mine used to make this point to his delusional liberal peers by pointing out that the only social context in which they ever found themselves in a crowd where the average IQ was 100 was when they were shopping at Wal-Mart. (Even there, it's probably higher.)

The U.S.'s meritocratic institutions have produced a society marked by "cognitive segregation," in Murray's terminology. The educated, professional, mobile citizens of our coastal areas and major cities lead lives in which their contact with the left side of the bell curve is rare and getting rarer. (One definition of "middle America" might be those areas, wherever they may be geographically, where the lower end of cognitive distribution is proportionally or even overrepresented. The elite don't like to live in such places.)

By contrast, Murray's realism is refreshing. Instead of making the usual gosh-our-schools-are-terrible charge, he argues that in many cases we are asking teachers to do the impossible. He concludes that while schools might be blamed for a low percentage of children knowing simple facts—because facts can be remembered by children with a wide range of abilities—they should not be blamed for other kinds of poor performance. "Many of the wrong answers," given by American students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, for instance, "reflect nothing more complicated than low academic ability."

It's a ridiculous situation. We accept with perfect equanimity that some children will not and cannot be exceptional or even above-average athletes or musicians, but when it comes to linguistic or logical-mathematical skills, this conclusion is publicly unacceptable. Murray would have us come to know each child, generate reasonable expectations for him, and then help that child meet those expectations. "The proposition on the table is that our best educational experiences were ones in which adults insisted we could do better when in fact we could do better; our worst educational experiences were ones in which adults insisted we could do better when in fact we could not do better."

So, for example, not everyone—indeed, only a minority—has the ability to undertake college-level studies. Murray estimates that 10 percent of American 17-year-olds have a two-thirds chance of achieving a B-minus average when confronted with genuine college-level material, a statistic that provides him with an upper-level estimate of the proportion of American children that should be pursuing a college education. Does this mean that a liberal education isn't for everyone? Not at all. But for most students, that education should come in the K-12 years. Murray promotes E.D. Hirsch's "Core Knowledge" curricular approach as a truly democratic, egalitarian way to go about this. That curriculum's emphasis on facts and narratives means children who are not especially able can absorb more.

The traditional four-year college, in Murray's ideal world, should be given over to high-level liberal arts studies and focus on producing graduates capable of precise verbal expression, logical analysis, forming rational judgments, and thinking seriously about the good. Meanwhile, we should stop encouraging students whose tastes and abilities are not fitted for such studies to waste four years and piles of cash (theirs and ours) in college. They would be much better off, economically and psychologically, pursuing vocational or technical training that matches their talents and proclivities. A reorientation of college stud-

ies back toward the liberal arts, combined with an expanded use of certification exams across a wide variety of occupations, would mean many fewer people pursuing the B.A. Not having a bachelor's degree would then lose its stigma. Major problem solved.

How will these reforms come about? Murray possesses a Millian faith in the power of evidence, logic, and data to persuade. But such confidence is probably unjustified because, as Murray well knows, his work reveals two unpalatable truths. The first is that in light of significant individual differences, the ever more perfect removal of restrictions on the rise of individual talent cannot fail but to produce vast inequality and the segregation of the more able from the less able; the second is that these individual differences are largely rooted in biology and cannot be socially engineered out of existence. The only social-engineering solution with a chance of working would be one that nurtured internal, cultural, religious, legal, or other limits on individual mobility. As members in good standing of the church of meritocracy, we find such constraints gallant and utterly unacceptable.

Finally, the biological basis of individual differences has a corollary that is even harder to swallow, which is that individual success in a meritocracy has little to do with merit, morally conceived. As Murray himself wisely suggests, gifted children must "be told explicitly, forcefully, and repeatedly that their intellectual talent is a gift that they have done nothing to deserve. They are not superior human beings, but very, very lucky ones. They should feel humbled by their good luck." Spinning that narrative would be a good first step toward dismantling not only the myth of educational romanticism, but the modern, architectonic myth of meritocracy as well. With the specter of mass genetic engineering looming, neither can be discarded soon enough. ■

Jeremy Beer received his doctorate in psychology from the University of Texas at Austin. His essay on the traditionalist critique of meritocracy appeared last year in Wendell Berry: Life and Work.

The Right Lesson

Continued from page 18

now passes for movement conservatism, with its establishment journalists and D.C. bureaucrats and insiders, and replacing it with a genuine oppositional force would be necessary to reform the Right. There is a moral as well as a practical reason for such a housecleaning: respectable conservatives have been implicated up to their ears in our present politics and have never risen above the role of being shills for the GOP.

There are several signs in this year's election returns that the Right may be returning to the path abandoned after 1964. Much of the Right in my state of Pennsylvania rejected McCain. They found his saber-rattling and neocon boilerplate about a "league of democracies" to be unacceptable. The 15 percent of Republican voters who went for Ron Paul in the primary did not, contrary to journalistic expectations, return to the fold. My culturally traditionalist, antiwar Mennonite neighbors voted in protest for Obama, other right-wing Pennsylvanians voted for one of the alternative candidates, while some chose not to vote at all. This antiwar and/or anti-neocon Right will not go away, even if establishment conservatives and liberals persist in pretending it doesn't exist.

This leads me to believe that there may be an opportunity to rebuild the American conservative movement and possibly even the GOP around a new strategy. But the first thing to be done is to abandon the failed precedent of the post-Goldwater epoch. The course the conservative movement pursued in alliance with the GOP after 1964 ended disastrously last week, in a spectacular victory for the radical, multicultural Left. ■

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Gardnering at Night

How many of us share a hometown with our favorite writer? Anaïs Nin and Ayn Rand did, but I'm not talking about self-love. Since I wasn't born in West Point or

Sauk Center or Baltimore or Henry County, I'm outta luck. But we play the hand we're dealt, which is why on a Saturday evening for the last dozen Octobers about 20 of us have gathered to read from the works of Batavia's John Gardner, the once prominent novelist whose audacious ambition was to reinfuse American literature with a moral purpose.

Gardner, one of the last American writers to grow up on a farm, was a hippie Republican anarchist who explained his politics to the *Atlantic*: "I am, on the one hand, a kind of New York State Republican, conservative. On the other hand, I am a kind of bohemian type. I really don't obey the laws. I mean to, but if I am in a hurry and there is no parking here, I park."

His best-known novel—the only one still read, as far as I can tell—is *Grendel* (1971), told from the Beowulfian monster's point of view. He set *The Resurrection* (1966) and *The Sunlight Dialogues* (1972) in our town, to which he dreamed of returning and finally did in a coffin, killed in a 1982 motorcycle accident. Here he is buried and remembered, even as English departments shoot him from the canon.

Our literary-culinary venue is the Pokadot, Gardner's favorite diner, the unselfconsciously funky eatery at the epicenter of the Italian-Polish southside. (Gardner, a Welsh Presbyterian, frequently teased his people for their anti-Italian-Catholic prejudices while sharing them: a neat way to have your *torta* and eat it too.) A middling speller, Gardner

wrote his mother—a former English teacher—just before *The Sunlight Dialogues* came out boasting that in the book he had set a scene in the diner and spelled "Polkadot" correctly. Alas, in a nod, perhaps, to simplified spelling, the diner dispenses with that silent "l."

Pokadot readers have included Gardner's family and friends and people mentioned in his books, but most of us—teachers, a dairy salesman, our independent bookseller, and my wife, daughter, and I—know him only through the stories he wrote and the stories that are told about him still. (My dad, a few years behind him in school, said that Gardner was "weird.")

A few regulars sit at the counter and sip coffee, bemused by the proceedings—maybe even edified, I like to kid myself.

I read this year from Gardner's *Poems* (1978), which he prefaced by saying that "relatively little of this present assembly ... is worth the life of a buttonwood tree." Not exactly an advertisement for himself.

He was a man of overwhelming regrets, as you would expect of someone who as an 11-year-old boy dragged a cultipacker, hitched to the tractor he was driving, over his 6-year-old brother's skull. What man wouldn't spend the rest of his life seeking nepenthe? (Gardner's best short story, "Redemption," is a barely fictionalized account of the accident and its aftermath.)

I closed with "Persimmons," in which he writes of being

suddenly grieved over things long forgotten—
the farm where I grew up, in New York State,
where I paid no attention to all my father taught,
so that now I cannot tell for sure a Baldwin
from a Jonathan or some other breed of apple.

Learn your apples and listen to your fathers, I sententiously instructed the teenagers in the audience.

At evening's end, Leonard, a southside character, invited us all to step outside and drink with him from a bottle of Polka Dot Riesling, which he noted was \$9.99 (minus a \$2 rebate) at the liquor store. Why not? Gardner was a boozehound. Leonard poured the wine into coffee mugs and we helped him drink it.

Ellicott Street, home of the Pokadot, is undergoing reconstruction, and we of the anarchic (no officers, no dues, no rules, but somehow we survive) John Gardner Society have offered to install a polkadot bench blazoned with the word LOVE, the graffito that sets in motion *The Sunlight Dialogues*. The polkadot Batavia LOVE bench—bet no one does that for Updike or Bellow.

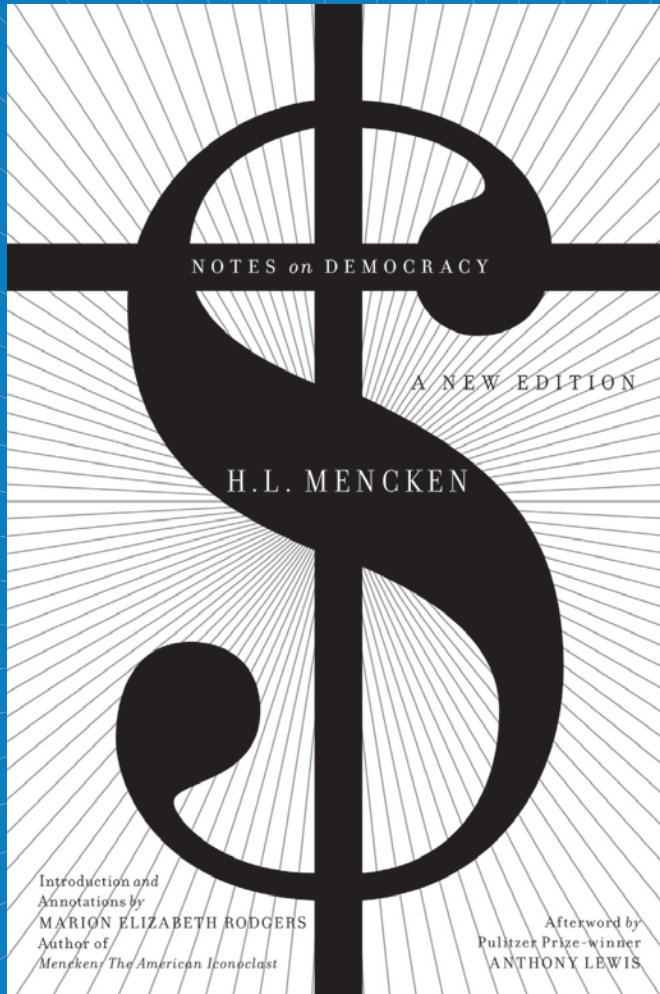
You know what? Gardner is not even among my hundred favorite American novelists. But he is ours. That is enough.

In "The Death of the Hired Man," Robert Frost wrote, "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, They have to take you in."

The literati against whom John Gardner railed have formed a circle to keep him out. That's okay. We are his home, and we take him in. Hell, we'll even read him, if it comes to that. ■

DEMOCRACY: THE FINAL SACRED COW TO ROAST— SERVED UP BY AMERICA'S GREATEST CYNIC AND WIT!

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